

WILL OF THE MILL

BY

G. MANVILLE FENN

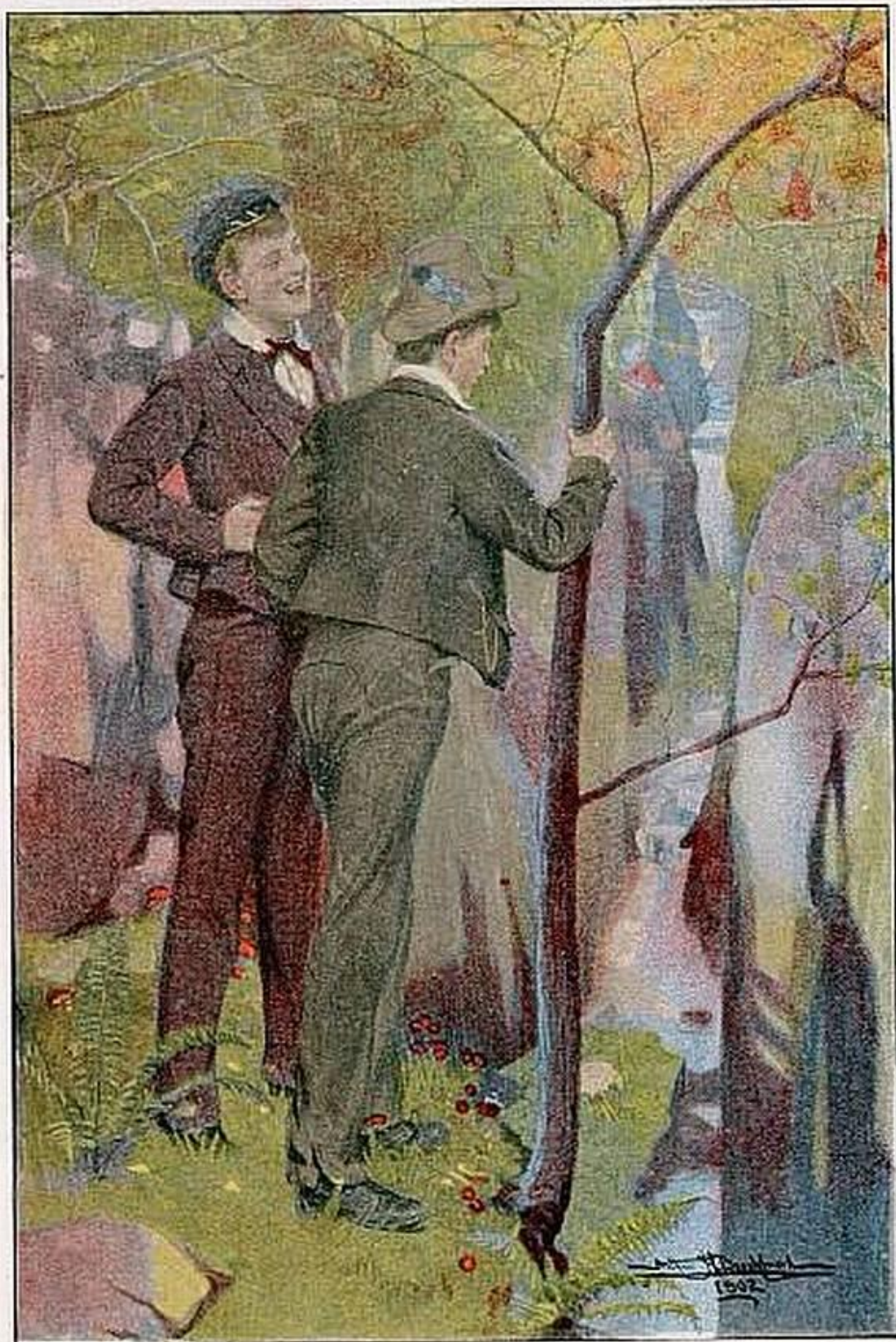
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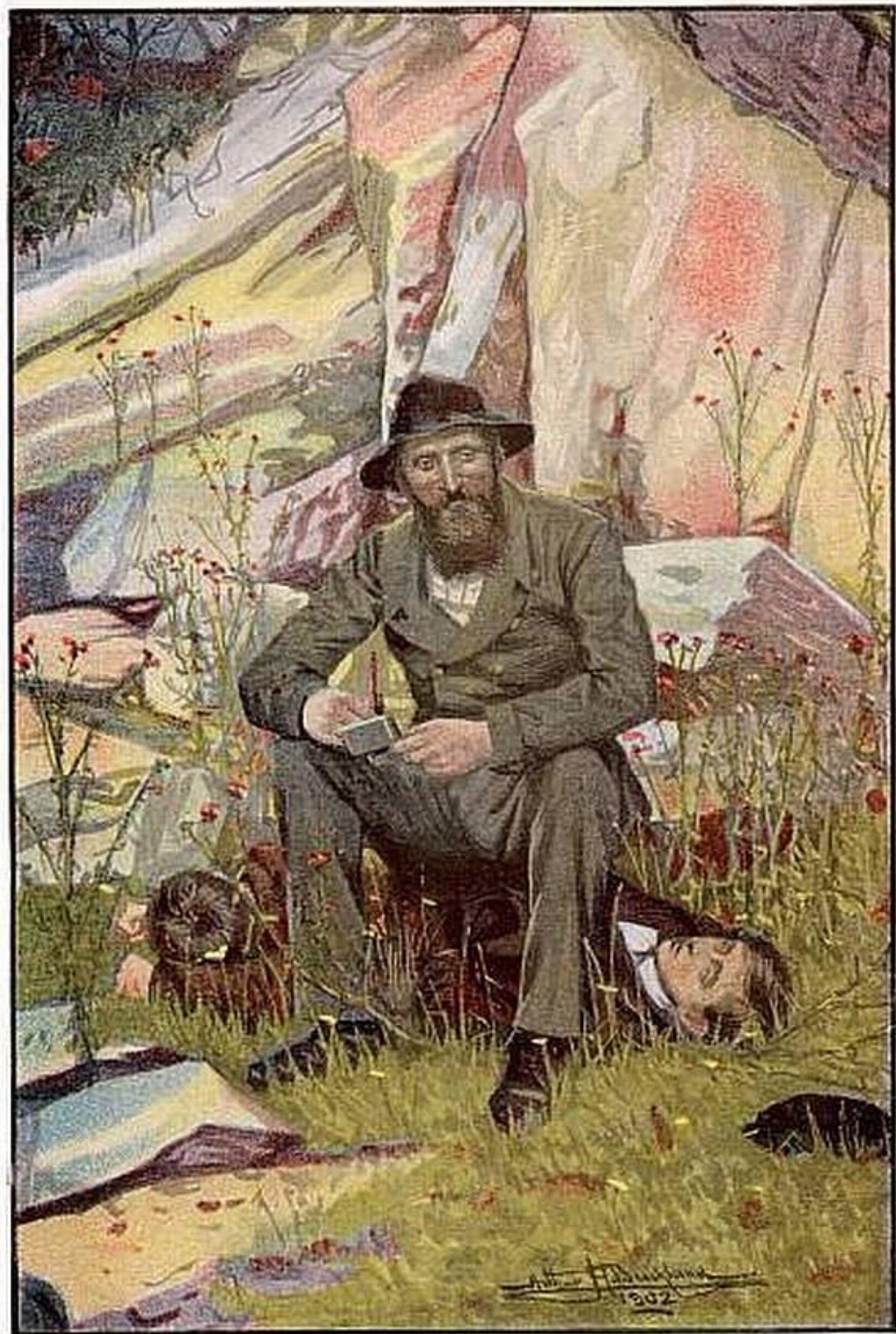
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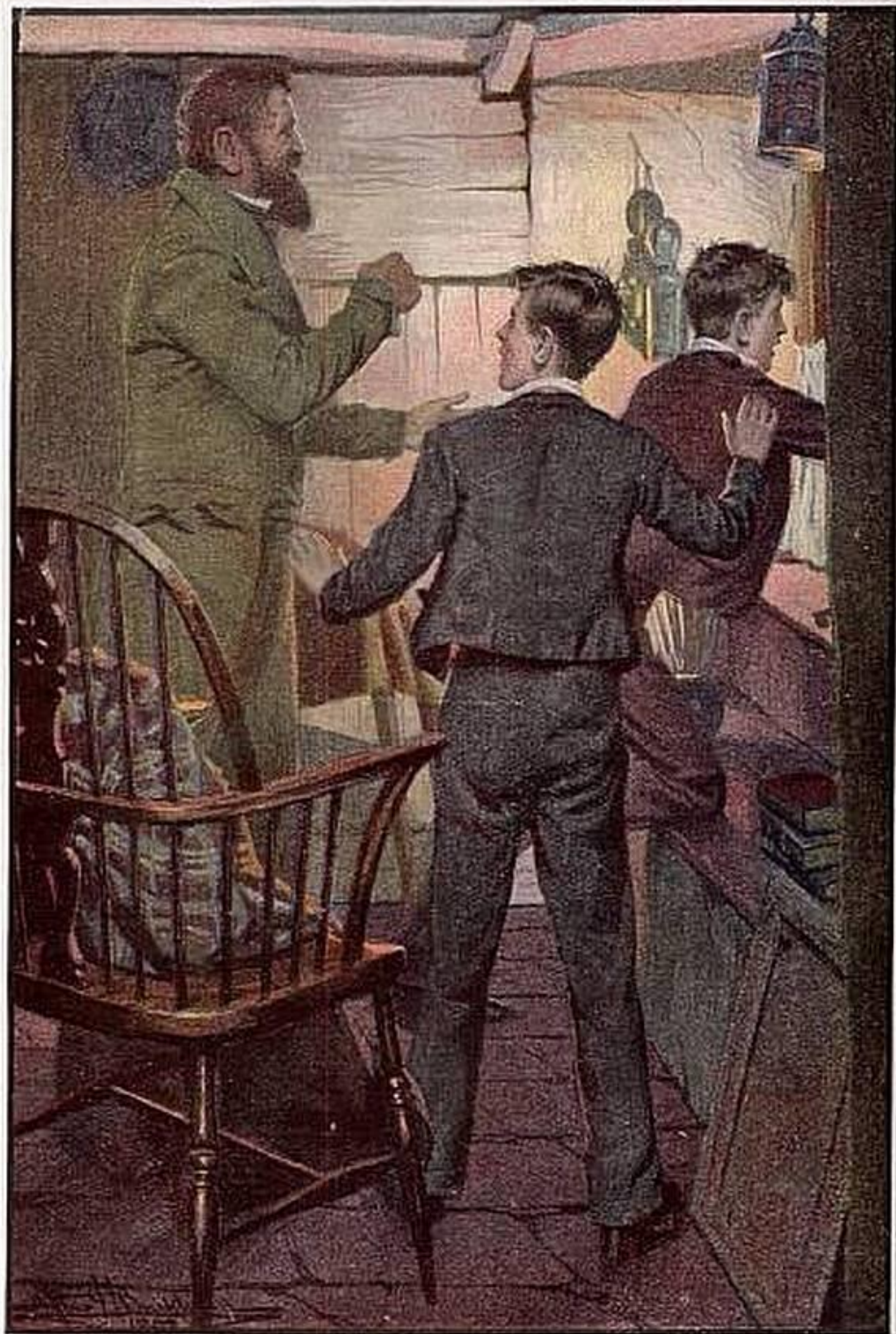
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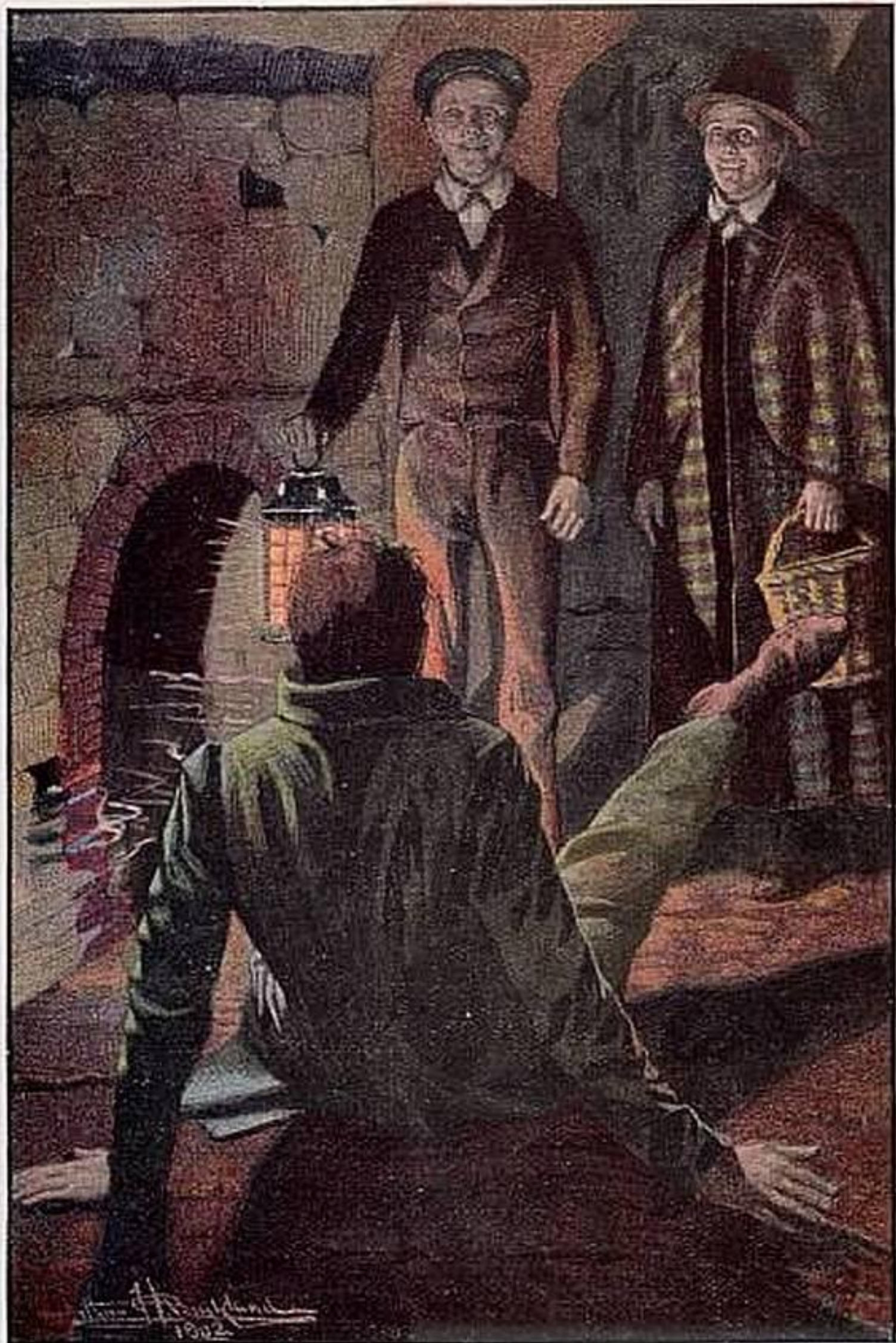
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Will of the Mill.

CHAPTER I.

Down in the Country.

HERE, I say, Josh, such a game!"

"What is it?"

The first speaker pointed down the gorge, tried to utter words, but began to choke with laughter, pointed again, and then stood stamping his feet, and wiping his eyes.

"Well," cried the other, addressed as Josh, "what is it? Don't stand pointing there like an old finger-post! I can't see anything."

"It's—it's—it's—he—he—he!—Oh my!—Oh dear!"

"Gahn! What an old silly you are! What's the game? Let's have a bit of the fun."

"The sun—sun—sun——"

"Don't stand stuttering there in that stupid way."

"I couldn't help it—there, I'm better now."

I was coming along the top walk, and there he was right down below, sitting under his old white mushroom."

"Well, I can't see anything to laugh at in that. He always is sitting under his old white umbrella, painting, when he isn't throwing flies."

"But he isn't painting. He's fast asleep; and I could almost hear him snore."

"Well, if you could hear him snore, you needn't make a hyena of yourself. I don't see anything to laugh at in that."

"No; you never see any fun in anything. Don't you see the sun's gone right round, and he's quite in the shade?"

"Well, suppose he is; where's the fun?"

Will Willows wiped his eyes, and then, with a mirthful look, continued—

"Oh, the idea struck me as being comic—keeping a great umbrella up when it wasn't wanted."

"Oh, I don't know," said Josh, solemnly; "a shower might come down."

"But, I say, Josh, that won't do. I've got such a rum idea."

"Let's have it."

"Come along, then."

A few words were whispered, though there

was not the slightest need, for no one was in sight, and the rattle and whirr of machinery set in motion by a huge water-wheel, whose splashings echoed from the vast, wall-like sides of the lovely fern-hung glen in which it was placed, would have drowned anything lower than a shout.

Willows' silk-mill had ages ago ceased to be a blot in one of the fairest valleys in beautiful Derbyshire, for it was time-stained with a rich store of colours from Nature's palette ; great cushions of green velvet moss clung to the ancient stone-work, rich orange rosettes of lichen dotted the ruddy tiles, huge ferns shot their glistening green spears from every crack and chasm of the mighty walls of the deep glen ; and here and there, high overhead, silver birches hung their pensile tassels, and scrub oaks thrust out their gnarled boughs from either side, as if in friendly vegetable feeling to grasp hands over the rushing, babbling stream ; for Bel-dale—Belle Dale, before the dwellers there cut it short—formed one long series of pictures such as painters loved, so that they came regularly from the metropolis to settle down at one of the picturesque cottages handy to their work, and at times dotted

the dale with their white umbrellas and so-called "traps."

Nature was always the grandest of landscape gardeners, and here she may be said to have excelled. Her work had been very simply done: some time or other when the world was young the Great Gray Tor must have split in two, forming one vast jagged gash hundreds of feet deep, whose walls so nearly matched, that, if by some earthquake pressure force had been applied, they would have fitted together, crushing in the verdant growth, and the vast Tor would have been itself again.

But, needless to say, this had never happened, and the lovely place, so well named, became Belle Dale.

High up in the Pennine Range the waters gathered in the great reservoirs of bog and moss to form a stream, an infant river, which ran clear as crystal, of a golden hue, right down the bottom of the gorge; here trickling and singing musically, there spreading into a rocky pool, plunging down into fall after fall, to gather again into black, dark hollows as if to gain force for its next spring; and nowhere in England did moss, fern, and water-plant grow to greater perfection than

here, watered as they were by the soft, fall-made mists.

All through the summer the place was full of soft, dark nooks, and golden hollows shaded by birch, through whose pensile twigs the sunshine seemed to fall in showers of golden rain—cascades of light that plunged into the transparent waters, and flashed from the scales of the ruddy-spotted trout.

No two boys ever had brighter homes, for their dwellings were here—Josh Carlile's at the Vicarage, planted on a shelf where the arrow-spired church looked down from near the head of the dale, where the first fall plunged wildly full thirty feet beside the little, mossy, stone-walled burial-ground. It was the home of mosses of every tint, from the high-up, metallic green in the cracks among the stones, down to the soft pink and cream patches of sphagnum, sometimes of their own vivid green when charged with water ready to spurt out at the touch of a traveller's foot.

Will's home—nest, he called it—was far below, at the mill, that pleasant home built first by one of his exiled ancestors, an old Huguenot who fled from France full of fervour, for his religion's sake, seeking refuge in old England, where, like many others, he

found a safe asylum to live in peace, and think.

Old Guillaume Villars had "Monsieur" written before his name; but he was one of France's fine old working gentlemen, a great silk-weaver, and his first thought was to find a place where he and his following, a little clan, could earn their bread as sturdy workers living by the work of their hands; no beggars nor parasites they, but earnest toilers, the men who introduced their industry every here and there.

Some two hundred years ago, old Guillaume found Belle Dale ready with its motive power to his hand. He wanted water for his silk-mill: there it was, and, in a small way, he and his began their toil.

Their nearest neighbours, few indeed, soon found them quiet, earnest, religious men, and the welcome they had was warm. In their gratitude they said, "France to us is dead; this in future is our home;" and, though clinging to their language, they cast aside their fine patrician names, making them English and homely like those of the dwellers near. There was something almost grotesque at times in the changes that they made, but they were not noticed here. The D'Aubignes

became Daubeney's, or homely Dobbs; Chapuis, Shoppee; Jean Boileau, the great silk-weaver's right hand, laughingly translated his name to Drinkwater; and, as the time went on and generations passed, a descendant, "disagreeable old Boil O!" as the two boys called him, was the odd man, Jack-of-all-trades, and general mechanic at Beldale Mill, the servant of old Guillaume Villars' son, many generations down—John Willows now, father of Will of the Mill.

A long piece of pedigree this, but we must say who's who, and what's what, and, by the same rule, where's where; so here we have Beldale Mill and the boys—just the place they loved and looked forward to reaching again from the great school at Worksop, when the holidays came round.

There was no such place for beauty, they felt sure; no such fishing anywhere, they believed; in fact, everything the country boy could wish for was to their hand. Collect?—I should think they did: eggs, from those of the birds of prey to the tiny dot of the golden-crested wren; butterflies and moths, from the Purple Emperors that were netted as they hovered over the tops of the scrub oaks, and hawk-moths that darted

through the garden, the only level place about the bottom of the glen. Fishing too—the artist who came down was only too glad to make them friends, seeing how they knew the homes of the wily trout in the rocky nooks below the great fall down by the sluice, where the waters rushed from beneath the splashing wheel; and in the deep, deep depths of the great dam where the waters were gathered as they came down from the hills above, forming a vast reserve that never failed, but kept up the rattle and clatter of looms from year to year, and formed a place where the boys early learned to dive and swim, making their plunges from one of the ferny shelves above. They were pretty high, some of these shelves, and required a cool head and steady nerve to mount to them in safety; but they had been improved in time. By a little coaxing, James Drinkwater had been induced by the boys to climb with them on the one side or the other of the gorge, armed with hammer and cold chisel, to cut a step here, and knock out a stone there, so that most of the shelves formed by the strata of limestone had been made accessible, and glorious places to ascend to for those who loved to scramble.

One of these shelves—the best of all, so Will said—was quite three hundred feet above the dam. It was filled with bristling, gnarled oak, and the walls beneath were draped with Nature's curtains, formed of the long strands of small-leaved ivy; and there, if you liked, you could look down, to the left, upon a lovely garden, the mossy roofs of mill and house, all to the left; while to the right you looked up the zig-zag gorge with its closed-in, often perpendicular walls, to see the glancing waters of the stream, and far up, the great plunging fall, flashing with light when the sun was overhead, deep in shadow as it passed onward towards the west.

Best of all, Will said, was lying on your breast looking right into the dam, pitching down collected pebbles, which fell with a splashless “chuck!” making “ducks’ eggs,” as they called it, and sending the white Aylesburys scuttling out of the way.

So much for the home of Will of the Mill.

CHAPTER II.

Fishing for Fun.

IT was up one of the shelves at the side of the great ravine that Will silently hurried his comrade, the Vicar's son, to where they could look down at the shelf below, a fairly open, verdant space, which offered before it on the other side of the stream just such a rocky landscape full of colour, light and shade, as artists love.

Will held up his hand to ensure silence, and then, taking hold of a projecting oak bough, peered down and signed to Josh to come and look. There was not much to see; there was an easel and a small canvas thereon, an open black japanned paint-box, a large wooden palette blotched with many colours lying on a bed of fern, and whose thumb-hole seemed to comically leer up at the boys like some great eye. Then there was a pair of big, sturdy legs, upon which rested a great felt hat, everything else being covered in by a great opened-out white umbrella, perfectly useless

then, for, as Will had said, all was now in the shade.

Both boys had a good look down, drew back and gazed at each other with questioning eyes, before Josh, whose white teeth were all on view, stooped down and made a slight suggestion, a kind of pantomime, that he should drag up a great buckler fern by the roots, and drop it plump on the umbrella spike.

Will's eyes flashed, and he puckered up his mouth and pouted his lips as if in the act of emitting a great round *No*.

Josh's eyes began to question, Will's teeth to glisten, as he thrust one hand into his pocket and drew out a ring of tough water-cord. This he pitched to his companion, with a sign that he should open it out, while from another pocket he took out a small tin box, opened the lid, and drew forth a little cork, into whose soft substance the barbs of a large, bright blue, double eel-hook had been thrust.

Busy-fingered Josh watched every movement, and it was his turn now to shake his sides and indulge in a hearty, silent laugh, as he handed one end of the unwound cord.

This was deftly fitted on, and then, with

every movement carefully watched and enjoyed, Will silently crept into the gnarled oak, till he was seated astride one of the horizontal projecting boughs, which began to play elastically up and down, but made no sign of loosening the parent stem, firmly anchored in the crevices of the limestone rock.

It was only a few feet out, and then the boy was exactly over the umbrella, some forty feet below. Then he began to fish, glancing from time to time through the leaves, as he sat watching and rubbing his hands.

The first gentle cast was a failure ; so was the second ; but the third time never fails. Will twisted the cord on his fingers, with the result that the double hook turned right over, and the barbed points, in answer to a gentle twitch, took hold of the white fabric, after passing right through.

Had there been earth below, in which the umbrella staff could have been stuck, the manœuvre must have failed ; but the shelf was nearly all rock, against some fragments of which the stick was propped. There was no failure then. There came up a faint rasping sound as of wood over stone, as the cord tightened, and then very slowly the umbrella began, parachute-like, to rise in the air,

higher and higher, as it was hauled up hand over hand till the spike touched the lower twigs of the horizontal oak bough.

The next moment it was being retained in its novel place by Will making fast the line, winding it in and out between two dead branches; and then the boy quietly urged himself back to where Josh was chuckling softly as he peered down. For he was having a good view of that which had been hidden from Will, but which it was his turn now to share; and, judging from his features, he did enjoy it much.

But it was only the face and upper portion of a big, muscular, tweed-clothed man, lying back with his hands under his head, eyes closed fast, and mouth wide open, fast asleep.

He was a sturdy-looking fellow, with a big brown beard and moustache; but the boys did not stop to look, only began to retrace their steps so as to get down upon a level with the shelf upon which the sleeper lay.

"Capital!" whispered Josh. "What will he say?"

"Don't know; don't care!" was the reply.

"We'd better get away, hadn't we?"

"No—o—oo! We must stop. I wouldn't be away on any account."

“But then he'll know we did it, and get in a rage.”

“Pst! Be quiet.”

Will hurriedly led the way till they reached a clump of bushes where they could squat down with a good view of the sleeper, who remained perfectly still.

Josh looked up at the umbrella, which looked as if the oak tree had bloomed out into one huge white flower. Pointing up with one hand, he covered his face with the other to stifle a laugh, and Will uttered a warning.

“Hist!”

Just at that moment, heard above the murmur of the machinery in the mill, and the wash and splash of the water, there arose the peculiar strident buzz of a large bluebottle, busily on the lookout for a suitable spot on which to lay eggs.

Evidently it scented the artist, and began darting to and fro over his open mouth.

In an instant there was an angry ejaculation, one hand was set at liberty, and several blows were struck at the obnoxious fly, which, finding the place dangerous, darted off, and the artist went loudly to sleep again. The boys exchanged glances, and Josh stole out one

hand, pulled a hart's-tongue fern up by the roots, and, with admirable aim, pitched it so that it fell right on the sleeper's chest.

The artist sat up suddenly, staring about him, while the boys crouched perfectly motionless in their hiding-place.

"What's that?" reached their ears, and they saw the sleeper feeling about till his hand came in contact with the dry fern root.

"Why, it must have been that," he muttered aloud, and he turned it over and over.

Josh uttered a faint sound as if he were about to burst out laughing.

"It must have come from above, somewhere. If it was those boys——" The artist looked up suspiciously as he spoke, and then, with a start, he turned himself over on his hands and knees, to begin gazing wonderingly up at the cotton blossom hanging from the tree.

"Well," he said, "I never felt it; it must have been one of those gusts which come down from the mountain."

Will pressed his hands tightly over Josh's mouth, for he could feel him heaving and swaying about as if he were about to explode.

"Blows up this valley sometimes," continued the artist, "just like a hurricane."

"Pouf!" went Josh, for Will's efforts were all in vain.

"Ah—h—h! I knew it!" cried the artist, springing to his feet in a rage. "You dogs! I see you!"

It was the truth the next moment, for Josh rushed off to get into safety, closely followed by Will, whilst their victim gave chase.

Hunted creatures somehow in their hurry to escape pursuit, have a natural inclination for taking the wrong route, the one which leads them into danger when they are seeking to be safe.

It was so here. Josh led, and Will naturally followed; but his comrade might have gone round by the mill, run for the stepping-stones, where he could have crossed and made for the rough hiding-places known to him on the other side of the stream; or he might have dodged for the garden gate, darted through, and made for the zig-zag path leading to the open moorland; but instead of this, he dashed down to the water-side, ran along by it, and then took the ascending path right up the glen, getting more and more out of breath, and with Will panting heavily close behind.

"Oh, you chucklehead!" cried the latter,

huskily. "Why did you come along here? You knew we couldn't go far."

"It's all right. He won't follow. He'll be tired directly; he's so fat."

"I don't care," cried Will, stealing a look over his shoulder; "fat or thin, he's coming along as hard as he can pelt."

"Yes, but he's about done."

"He isn't, I tell you; he's coming faster than you can go. Go along: look sharp!"

The boys ran on, Josh getting more and more breathless every moment, while he began to lose heart as he heard the artist shouting to him to stop.

"Here, Will," he cried, "which way had I better go? Up the long crack, or make for the fox's path?"

"One's as bad as the other," cried Will. "Fox's path. Here, go on faster. Let me lead; I know the way best. I never saw such an old chucklehead. Why did you come this way?"

He brushed by his companion as he spoke, his legs making a whishing sound as he tore through clumps of fern and brake, running on and on over the rapidly-rising ground till the path was at an end, and they drew closer to a spot where the rocks closed in, forming

a *cul de sac*, unless they were willing to take a leap of some twenty feet into a deep pool, or climb up the rocky wall just in front.

"We can't jump," panted Will.

"No," half whispered Josh. "Oh, what a mess we are in! You will have to beg his pardon, Will."

"You'll have to hold your tongue, or else we shall be caught. It's all right; come on. I can get up here."

The boy proved it by springing at the rocky face, catching a projecting block and the tufts of heath and heather, kicking down earth and stone as he rose, and scrambling up some fifteen feet before gaining a resting-place, to pause for a moment to look down and see how his companion was getting on.

To his horror, Josh was almost at the bottom of the wall, and, scarlet with fury and exertion, the artist panting heavily about two score yards behind.

"I've got you, you dogs! It's no use, I've got you!"

"Oh!" groaned Will, ready to give up, wondering the while whether the artist would thrash him with his elastic maulstick.

"No, he hasn't," cried Josh. "Run, run! Never mind me."

"Shan't run," snarled Will, between his teeth. "Here, catch hold of my hands."

He lay down on his chest, hooking his feet in amongst the tough roots of the heather.

"Come on, I tell you! Catch hold."

Obeying the stronger will, Josh made a desperate scramble, putting into it all the strength he had left, and, regardless of the angry shouts of the artist, he scrambled up sufficiently high for Will to grasp him by the wrists. He could do no more, for his feet slipped from beneath him, and he hung helpless, and at full length, completely crippling his companion, who had the full weight dependent on his own failing strength.

Encouraged by this, the breathless artist made his final rush, and succeeded in getting Josh by the ankles, holding on tightly in spite of the boy's spasmodic movement, for as he felt the strong hands grasp his legs, he uttered a yell, and began to perform motions like those of a swimming frog.

"Be quiet! Don't!" roared Will. "You'll have me down."

"Let go, you dog!" shouted the artist. "I've got him now."

"Let go yourself," cried Will, angrily.
"Can't you see you are pulling me down?"

"Oh, yes, I can see. Let go yourself."

"Shan't!" growled Will, through his set teeth. "Kick out, Josh, and send him over."

"I can't!" cried Josh.

"He'd better! I'd break his neck."

"Never mind what he says, Josh. Kick! Kick hard!"

"Kick! I've got you tight. I could hold you for a wee—wee——"

He was going to say "week," but Fate proved to him that this was a slight exaggeration on his part, and instead of finishing the word week he gave vent to a good loud "oh!" For the heather roots had suddenly given way, and the three contending parties descended the sharp slope with a sudden rush, to be brought up short amongst the stones that accompanied them in a contending heap, forming a struggling mass for a few moments, before the strongest gained the day, the artist rising first, and seating himself in triumph upon the beaten lads, to begin dragging out his handkerchief to mop his face, as he panted breathlessly—

"There, I've got you now!"

CHAPTER III.

The Artist's Revenge.

IT was not manly on Josh's part, but he was weak, beaten, quite in despair; the artist was a heavy man; and he had his companion Will upon him as well.

Consequently his tone was very pathetic, as he whimpered out—

“Here, you'd better let me alone!”

“Likely!” said the artist. “I wanted a model, and now you have got to sit for me.”

Will didn't whimper in the least. Pain and anger had put him in what would have been a towering rage if he had not been prostrate on the ground.

“Here, you get up,” he said, in a bull-dog tone.

“By and by,” cried the artist, coolly, as he began to recover his breath. “I haven't made up my mind what I am going to do yet.”

“If you don't get up, I'll bite,” cried Will.

“You'd better! It's my turn now; I've got a long score to settle against you two fellows, and I'm going to pay you out.”

As he spoke, the artist took out his pipe and tobacco pouch, and began to fill up.

"Get up!" shouted Will. "You hurt."

"So do you," said the artist, "you nasty, bony, little wretch! You feel as if you must be half-starved."

As he uttered the words there was a loud scratching, and he struck a match, lit his pipe, and began to smoke, while the boys, now feeling themselves perfectly helpless, lay waiting to see what he would do next.

"Ha!" said the artist. "I think that'll about do. You chaps are never happy unless you are playing me some trick. I've put up with it for a long time; but you know, young fellows, they say a worm will turn at last. Well, I'm a worm, and I'm going to turn, and have my turn."

"What are you going to do?" cried Will.

"Want to know?"

"Of course I do."

"You'd better leave us alone," whimpered Josh.

"Think so? Well, I will, after I've done. I'm going to wash some of the mischief out of you. I shall just tie your hands together—yes, I can easily do it now—and then drop you both into the pool."

“What?” yelled Josh. “Why, you’d drown us!”

“Hold your noise, Josh. He daren’t.”

“Daren’t! Why not? You are only boys, and all boys are a nuisance. You’ve spoilt five of my canvases, and wasted a lot of my paint, making scarecrows—at least, one of you did. But there, I won’t be hard; I’ll only drop in the one who did it. Who was it? Was it you, Josh Carlile?”

Josh was silent.

“Ah! I expect it was. It was he, wasn’t it, Will?”

Will was silent too.

“Now I’m sure it was. Now then, Will; out with it. Tell me. It was Josh Carlile, wasn’t it?”

“Shan’t tell,” cried Will; “and if you don’t let us get up directly, I’ll poke holes through all your canvases, and pitch your paints into the dam.”

The artist filled his mouth as full of tobacco smoke as he could, bent down, and puffed it in a long stream full in the boy’s face, making him struggle afresh violently, but all in vain.

“Well, you are a nice boy—very,” said the artist. “Your father must be very proud of you. It is quite time you were washed;

you've a deal of mischief in you that would be much better out. Now then, it was Josh Carlile, wasn't it?"

"I won't tell you. Pitch us in if you dare. Don't you mind, Josh. He's only saying it to frighten us."

"Yes; a very nice boy," said the artist, gravely; "but as I promised, I won't be hard, for anyhow you've got some pluck. Look here, how did you manage to get my gamp up yonder?"

"Went up above and fished for it," said Will, coolly.

"Fished for it? What with?"

"Water-cord and an eel-hook," growled Will. "I say, Mr. Manners, this is bad manners, you know; you do hurt awfully."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the artist, boisterously. "Fished it up with an eel-hook? Well, I suppose I am heavy. Look here, if I let you get up, will you fish it down?"

"Won't promise," growled Will.

"All right; I believe you will," and he rolled off, leaving the boys at liberty to spring up, Josh to begin rubbing himself all over, Will to dash to the first big stone, catch it up, and make an offer as if to throw it at the artist's head.

The latter blew a cloud of smoke at the passionate-looking lad, and sat looking him full in the face.

"All right," he said, coolly; "chuck!"

Will raised the stone as high as he could, and hurled it with all his might high in the air so that it should fall with a heavy splash into the pool below.

"Ha!" cried the artist. "Feel better now?"

"Yes," said Will, brushing himself down.

"But I say, Mr. Manners, you are a jolly weight."

"Yes, I suppose I am. I say, I'm going to have a try after the trout to-night. Where had I better go?"

"Likely I'm going to tell you after serving me like this!"

"Of course it is. I was going to ask you to come."

"Will you ask me, if I do?"

"Likely I'm going to ask you after serving my gamp like that!"

"Oh, I'll soon get that down," replied Will, cheerily. "Here! you go, Josh. I put it up. I'm tired now; I had all his weight on me."

"Well, but I had all his weight and yours too, and I'm sore all over."

"You can't be," said Will. "You must be sore all under, for you were at the bottom."

"Oh, but I can't, Will. I feel as if I was tired out."

"All right," cried Will, "I'll go;" and, springing up, he scampered down to the level where the easel and canvas still stood, and climbed up as the others followed more slowly; and a few minutes later the umbrella came parachute-like down, to be folded up by its owner. Will shouldered the easel, Josh tucked the canvas under his arm, and they all walked up-stream together as if nothing had happened, towards Drinkwater's attractive little cottage, which formed the temporary home of the lover of rustic art, and discoursing the while about the red-spotted beauties whose haunts Will was to point out that evening after tea.

The cottage with its pretty garden was reached, and the boys handed their loads to the owner.

"What time will you be here?" he said.

"We ought to start at five," replied Will, "but we can't get here till nearly six, because Josh is going to have tea with me."

"Look here, both of you come up and

have tea with me. Mrs. Drinkwater shall put two extra cups."

"Mean it?" cried Will.

"Mean it?" said the bluff artist. "Why, of course!"

The next minute the boys were walking down together towards the mill.

"Say, Josh," said Will, thoughtfully, "he isn't such a bad fellow, after all."

"No," said Josh, dubiously, "but he's an awful weight."

CHAPTER IV.

Lost on the Tor.

“**W**ELL, go and ask Mr. Manners to come up, then,” said Mr. Willows, one morning a few days later, as Will and Josh stood waiting; “that is,” he went on, “if you really think that he would like to come. I should be very pleased to see him. But don’t worry the man.”

“Oh, I’m sure he would, father,” said Will; “wouldn’t he, Josh?”

“Yes,” said Josh, quickly. “I know he’s been wanting to see the place.”

“He’s thrown out hints,” said Will.

“Oh, has he?” said the mill-owner, with a smile. “Thrown out hints, eh? Well, I shall be delighted to see him. But I thought you two chaps were not on very good terms with him.”

“Oh yes, father; it’s all right now. Of course we thought that he was only a painter, but he is really a splendid chap. Come on, Josh; we’ll get him to come up now.”

"Only a painter!" said Mr. Willows, with a laugh, as he looked after them.

The two lads started for the cottage where the artist, who was making picture after picture of the neighbourhood, took his meals—when, that is, he did not picnic in the open, which was fairly frequently—and where he slept—and one could sleep in that crisp mountain air.

"No, my dears," said Mrs. Drinkwater, who had come down to the little white gate to speak to them. "Mr. Manners is out, I am very sorry."

"Oh!" said Will.

"Where's he gone?" asked Josh.

"He went off very early this morning, sir," said the woman. "He told me to cut him some sandwiches. He said that he would be away all day, as he was going as far as the Tor."

"And never asked us!" cried Josh. "What a jolly shame!"

"Humph! It is a pity," said Will, and he turned away. "I say, why shouldn't we go after him?"

"Perhaps he doesn't want us."

"Nonsense!" said Will.

"Then let's go. I'm willing, only I

thought you would say that it was too far."

"It's you that would say that."

"Bosh!" said Josh.

"Go on. Be funny. Bosh, Josh! That's a joke, I suppose."

"Oh, all right; I'm ready," said Josh.

"But it is no end of a long way."

"Why, we've been there lots of times before now."

"Yes, but we started early in the morning."

"It doesn't matter," said Will. "I have been wanting to go there again for a long time."

The Great Gray Tor was surrounded by mists which were wreathed round it half-way up, while the dark summit peering out above the vapour looked like some vast head emerging from a miniature sea.

"It's glorious," said Will, as the two boys got away into the wild rugged country, clothed here and there with marshes where numbers of flowers were growing luxuriantly, their blooms making bright splashes of colour. "Fancy his wanting to paint all this, though!"

"Oh, I believe he would paint anything."

"Well, he will soon have finished everything here. He's done the mill, and the sunsets, and old Drinkwater's cottage. There will be nothing left soon for him to daub."

"Oh, yes; there will," said Josh, knowingly, as they trudged on. "I heard my father talking about it. He said these artist chaps had a new way of looking at everything each day of their lives. So that means that he will want to paint everything all over again. Glad I am not an artist. I don't like doing things over again."

"Ho!" said Will. "I don't care."

"No more do I," said Josh, "for I'm not an artist and I am not going to be one. But what are you staring at?"

"I've lost the way," said Will, at last.

"Ditto," said Josh. "Have you really? Shout. Mr. Manners might hear."

"You shout."

Josh did so.

"Bah! Nobody could hear that."

Josh shouted once more.

"Shout again," said Will.

"No, you have a try. I shall be hoarse."

"All right then.—Mr. Manners—ahoy!"

"He won't hear the Mister," said Josh, scornfully.

"No, of course not," said Will.

"Manners—ahoy!"

"Ahoy!" came in a faint whisper.

"It's an echo," said Josh.

"Well, I know that, stupid."

"He may have come round another way," hazarded Josh.

"May anything," said Will. "But I don't believe there is another way.—Mr. Manners!—Ahoy!" he shouted.

"Ahoy—y?" came back faintly again.

"There!"

"It is only the echo. Seems too foolish to lose your way in a place like this."

"Good as anywhere else," said Josh, cheerily. "But there's the Tor, and there's Mr. Manners."

"Where is he?" said Will, sharply.

"Why, at the Tor."

"Ugh! There, come on. None of your jokes."

"Well, we can't be far wrong," said Josh.

"We might be miles out," said Will; "and it will be dark soon. We were precious stupid to come all this way on the bare chance of meeting him. He may have gone off home."

"Then we should have been sure to meet him."

"Why?" said Will.

"Because he would have come this way. It's the only safe one, on account of the bogs. Somewhere near here a man and a horse were swallowed up once."

"Don't believe it," said Will.

"You ask father."

It was steady uphill work now; then real climbing; here and there their way was checked by a miniature heather-crowned crater, down which they peered, to see stony ledges and then a sheer fall.

"He is only an ignorant Londoner after all," said Will, thoughtfully, as they scrambled on. "He might have let himself fall down one of those places."

"Any one might do that," said Josh. "Hark! What's that?"

"Didn't hear anything," said Will.

"That's because you don't listen. Now!" said Josh sharply.

Will uttered a cry.

"Yes," he said, excitedly.

"You heard it?"

"Yes, yes!"

There was a groan.

"There!" cried Will. "It's Mr. Manners, and something's happened to him.—Manners!—Ahoy!"

No answer came.

"Wouldn't be having a game with us, would he?"

"No," said Josh. "I don't think he'd do that."

"Then let's go on a bit farther."

The late afternoon sun lit up the valley away to the left, which the Tor had hitherto concealed from their view. They scrambled on in the heat over the rough stone escarpments and amidst the gorse.

"Now, let's listen again," said Will.

They halted, and Josh wiped his streaming face.

"Shout again," he said huskily.

"Shall I?"

"Yes."

"Manners!—Ahoy!" shouted Will.

There was no response.

"Perhaps it wasn't he," said Josh.

"Perhaps he's so busy painting something or another that he hasn't been able to hear."

"Oh, perhaps anything," said Will. "Come on, I am certain now. It's that big cleft where we found the stonechats. He will have fallen down there, paint and all."

"Help!" came faintly now. "Help—help!"

"Hear that?" panted Josh, looking scared, and then radiant.

"Yes," said Will; "I hear. He's in danger." And the two lads tore on as fast as they could up the steep slippery incline.

CHAPTER V.

The Search Party.

"MASTER WILL has not been back, sir," said the servant, when Mr. Willows inquired towards evening as to the whereabouts of his son.

"But," he said to himself, "he was going to fetch that artist. Oh, he will be all right."

Yet as evening wore on the mill-owner began to feel anxious, and his anxiety caused him to take his hat and stick and walk up to the Vicarage.

"Will?" said the Vicar, "No. Isn't he at the mill?"

"No—nor Josh."

"Ah!" said the Vicar. "I have not seen either of them all day."

"Humph! They ought to be able to take care of themselves by this time. But I shall go on to Drinkwater's cottage and inquire."

"I'll come with you," said the Vicar, eagerly, and he took his hat off its peg in

the square-shaped wainscotted hall. "Our two lads," he said, as they walked quickly along the road to the cottage, "are so much together that I always feel that when Josh is out he is sure to be at the mill. That is why I never feel particularly surprised when he does not come back to meals."

"Just so; but they are so ready to be up to mischief that I am beginning to be afraid. Ah! at last," continued Mr. Willows, with a sigh, as they reached the cottage, where lights shone already through the white-curtained windows.

He passed through the nicely kept garden and knocked at the door, which was opened by Mrs. Drinkwater, who curtsied when she saw who her visitors were.

"Have you seen my son, Mrs. Drinkwater?" asked Mr. Willows. "Did he come here to-day to see Mr. Manners?"

"Yes, sir; this morning," said the woman, making way for the two visitors to enter the neatly furnished sitting-room, where supper was on the way.

"Oh! this morning? But I am disturbing you at supper. Evening, James," he said, as he and his companion entered

the room, to see Drinkwater, who was just finishing his meal.

"Good-evening, sir. Disturbing me? No matter, master," said the man, rising and standing facing the new-comers, with one hand on the table. "So Master Will was here this morning, wife?"

"Yes, yes," cried the woman; "as I say. He and Mr. Josh came down together. They were looking for Mr. Manners then, and seemed disappointed-like that he was out."

"Of course," said the mill-owner; "of course. They would be. They wanted the artist to come to the mill. Well, well! And afterwards what happened?"

"Well, sir, Mr. Manners had gone, and that's all I know, sir. The two young gentlemen went away together."

"They went to look for him, naturally. But where had he gone?"

"He was going to the Tor, sir. He went away early, with his canvas and things, to paint a picture."

"You hear, Carlile? Something must have happened, or they would have been back by now. We must go. Look here, Drinkwater, you will come with us?"

"Yes, master," said the man, with surly readiness.

"It may be some accident," continued Mr. Willows.

"Oh, I pray not, sir," said the woman. "Those two dear lads, and Mr. Manners, who is always so cheerful!"

"Come then," cried Mr. Willows. "What are you looking for?"

"Rope, sir," said the man, gruffly. "It may be useful—and a lantern. We shall want it at least;" and as he spoke the words he pulled out of the chest over which he had been stooping a coil of hempen rope. He then took a little lantern from a ledge and lit it. "Now I am ready, master."

"You are an excellent fellow, Drink-water," said the mill-owner, clapping his hand on the other's shoulder, as they stepped out.

"Nay, nay, master," said the man. "I have the bad fits on me sometimes, and bad they are."

"Bad fits?" said Mr. Willows, in a puzzled way. "What do you mean?"

The man nodded.

"Yes," he said, "yes. That's what they are. I can't help them, master."

"Oh," said the mill-owner; "you must try."

The bright light from the cottage door, at which the woman stood watching them, streamed out and lit up their path for a few steps. Then they were in the pitch darkness, and in danger of completely losing their way, for it was rough broken country that lay between the little settlement and the Tor. In that district villages were few and far between, and beyond Beldale there was uncultivated land for many miles.

"They would be sure to come back this way, wouldn't they?" asked Mr. Willows. "Don't you think so, James?"

"Pretty nigh certain, master," was the response, and the man held the lantern aloft and glanced round. "It's a rough enough way and no mistake, if you can call it a way; but it's the only one I knows of. But don't you fret, sir. Master Will can take care of himself, and as for Mr. Manners, he's big enough, while Master Josh is a handy one too. They are sure to be all right, sir, take my word for it."

"Yes," said Mr. Willows; "but there are many dangerous places there out in

the wilds, and boys are over-venture-some."

"Humph! The swamp? Ay," said the man, thoughtfully. "Yes, to be sure. But we shall find them, never fear."

The Great Tor looked quite near at times, in the daylight, but that was merely base deception on the part of the atmosphere, for it was quite a long way, while now, at night, it was not to be seen at all. It was on the tip of John Willows' tongue several times to ask Drinkwater if he were sure, but he reflected what would be the use? For the man was plodding steadily on, and the tiny rays of his lantern fell on the rough grass and stones. Evidently he knew quite well what he was about, for there was a certainty in his movements—never any hesitation.

"Suppose," said the Vicar, "that they have gone back home another way."

"Aren't no use supposing, sir. I don't think as they have," said the man, quietly. "This 'ere's the only safe way through the bog."

"Very well," said Mr. Willows, shortly. "We must just press on. I wish Mr. Manners wouldn't lead our lads so far afield."

“Yet, if they followed him——” said the Vicar.

“Ah, yes, to be sure. He strikes one as being a good reliable man. Ah!” And he gave a snatch at the Vicar’s arm. “I was nearly down that time. Terribly rough.”

“Terribly,” was the reply. “Drinkwater!”

“Yes, sir.”

“Let us keep one each side of you. It is so dark, and the lantern will help us better that way.”

CHAPTER VI.

The Artist's Plight.

THE two boys were at the edge of the fissure at length, and leaned over to peer down through the bracken and heather which grew on the sides of the rough descent.

"Help!" came up faintly.

"Mr. Manners! where are you? It's all right. We're here."

"Thank Heaven! That you, boys? Ah! I am on a shelf down here—been here for hours—a long way down; and I have sprained something. Can you get help?"

"Well, we are here," said Will, "and I am coming down."

"So am I," said Josh.

"No, no. It is too dangerous," came up.

"Is it?" said Will. "You lie quiet, Mr. Manners. We are coming. There," he continued to Josh, "take hold of the bracken, and keep your big boots out of my face, can't you?" For he was already on his way down.

"Same size as yours," said Josh. "I say,

it's precious deep ! Coming, Mr. Manners—coming ! ”

“ Be careful,” came faintly.

“ Oh, yes ; we will be careful,” said Will. “ Ah ! I say, Josh, look out there. I slipped. It's sheer down. Oh, now I see. Hallo, Mr. Manners ! Come on, Josh. 'Tisn't as dark as I thought. Here we are ; ” and the boy slipped the rest of the way down, to a fairly wide ledge, on which the artist lay in rather an awkward position.

“ Mr. Manners, are you much hurt ? ” asked Will, as he dropped down softly by the artist's side.

“ Yes, my boy ? I am rather badly. But take care. Take care, Josh ! ”

“ Oh, we are all right, sir. What's the matter ? ”

“ I fell while trying to get to that peak there for a better view.”

“ But where does it hurt ? ” said Will.

“ I've twisted my arm,” said the artist, “ and injured my ankle to boot. That's a joke. Look here, Will ; you could help me to get my arm free. It's—it's painful ; that's what it is.”

“ Wait a minute,” said Will ; and he altered his position on the ledge, shifting

himself along so as to be nearer to where the artist lay. "Now," he said. "Ah!"

"Yes, I am heavy, am I not?" said the artist, with a sort of chuckle. "Oh!" he continued, with a groan. "I don't think it's possible for you to do it."

"I think it is," said Will. "You, Josh—Steady!—Yes, that's right; get down on his other side. Now, Mr. Manners, I will help to pull you over, and Josh shall push. Now—are you ready?"

"Ready! Ay, ready!" said the artist, with a ghastly attempt at a smile.

"Now then, Josh!"

By an united effort the position of the artist was altered, and the victim to a nasty fall gave a sigh as he folded his injured left arm across his chest.

"I—I—— Brave boys! Good lads! I——"

"Oh, that's all right, sir," said Will.

"I say, Josh!"

"Well?"

"He's fainted!"

"Phew!" whistled Josh. "Then he must be very bad."

"I'm afraid he is."

"Couldn't we ease him up a bit?"

"No. What I want to know is what we have got to do."

"We have just got to hold on," said Josh, doggedly. "That's what we've got to do."

"No. You run back, I tell you," gasped Will. "Fetch help."

"Run back!" said Josh, scornfully. "Six miles! I don't believe I could find the way; and anyhow I am not going to leave you two here."

"But I can hold him fast; and how are we to get help if you don't? I shall be here to see him."

"So shall I," said Josh.

"No, I tell you. Climb up and get back home. How are they to know?"

"I don't know," said Josh. "Did they know where we were coming?"

"No. How could they?"

"Then it's just wait till morning Heigh-ho!"

"But Mrs. Drinkwater——"

"Of course!" cried Josh. "What a stupid I was! Mrs. Drinkwater knew."

"She mightn't remember," said Will.

"Of course she would. Didn't she tell us where he had gone?"

"Yes," answered Will; "but—there, Josh, you had better be off."

"No. Why don't you go?"

"What, and leave you here?"

"There!" said Josh. "It's just the same. But what's that?"

"I didn't hear anything."

"I did—a call. There, can't you hear it now?"

"It's a bird," said Will, as they both listened. "That's all. But there, if you won't go, I tell you what you might do—clamber up and hoist a signal."

"What signal?"

"Your handkerchief," said Will.

"Would it do any good?" asked Josh.

"It's a precious long way up. How is he?"

Will leaned over the unconscious man.

"Asleep, I think," he said quietly.

"How dark it's getting. Look up there! Why, the sky's nearly black."

"I think I will climb up and shout," said Josh. "They are sure to come and look for us, and that will help them."

"Right," said Will. "But mind how you go!"

"Oh, yes; I'll be careful," said Josh,

and he began slowly to climb. "It's much easier here," he said breathlessly.

Will listened to his scrambling.

"How are you getting on?" he asked.

"Capitally. I'm near the top."

A few more minutes elapsed, and then a voice came down—

"I'm up."

"Right."

"Will!"

"Yes."

"I've fastened my handkerchief to the stump of a bush."

"That's right."

"I say!"

"Well?"

"How shall we get Mr. Manners up when they do come?"

"Push and pull," said Will.

"But he's awfully heavy."

"Oh, I know; but we shall manage. I say, I wonder where his paint-box and things are. Perhaps they all went down with him."

"Not they," said Josh, as his foot kicked against something. "They are all up here. I've got them. Isn't he awake yet?"

"No — yes — I say, Mr. Manners, are you better?"

“I—Where am I?—Oh, yes, I remember. Better? I think so. What are you doing here?”

“Came to find you, and——”

From above there came a shout.

“Hallo!” said Will. “That’s Josh found then.”

CHAPTER VII.

The Rescue.

"**T**HAT you, boys?" came from somewhere far above, out of the darkness, and it was Josh who answered, while Will said in a low tone:

"I say, Mr. Manners, I *am* glad. Now don't you think you could get up? It's father and Mr. Carlile."

The artist made a brave attempt.

"I could stand on one leg," he said, "but that's about all I'm good for. My ankle gives way at once."

"Then we must just wait," said Will. "That's the only thing to do. It was my father who called. Say, Josh!"

"Hallo!"

"That you, my boy?" came from above.

"Yes, father."

"I must sit down again," said the artist, in a low tone, for he had been standing supporting himself against the wall of the ledge.

"No, sir," said Drinkwater, as he flashed his lantern round. "If Mr. Manners has

hurt himself and can't walk, as Mr. Josh says he has, we shan't be able to haul him up. The rope I brought wouldn't do it; and besides, we should have no purchase here."

"Then what are we to do?" said Mr. Willows, impatiently. "Tell me what you advise."

"There's another way down," said the man, sturdily. "We couldn't pull him up there. I know the place he's on. We can get to it if we go along here; there's a zig-zag path."

"Capital!" said the mill-owner. "Come along."

The path the man referred to was a roundabout one, but it led them to the place where the artist lay.

"It's a good job we came, sir," said Mr. Willows. "Not a nice place to spend the night in. You fell down here?"

"Yes," said the artist; "unfortunately."

"Humph!" said the mill-owner. "Now we have got to get you up."

"What a pity he's such a heavy-weight," said Will to Josh, in a whisper.

"Drinkwater has found a special way down here. You will have to lean on two

of us and manage it somehow. Mr. Carlile, take the lantern, will you, please? Now, Drinkwater, get hold of Mr. Manners' other arm."

"Right, master."

"Do you think you can do it?" said Mr. Willows.

"Don't know," said the artist; "but I will try."

"That's the style," said the mill-owner. "There, lean heavily on me. You, Drinkwater, get firm hold of his other arm. Slowly does it!" And the little procession started.

"It took me a long while to get here," said the artist, "but as for getting back——"

"Don't you worry about that," said the Vicar. "We shall manage all right, never fear."

It was after about an hour that the Vicar went up to Mr. Willows.

"Now let me have a turn, Drinkwater," he said.

"We are getting along so well that I think we had better not change," said the mill-owner.

Mr. Carlile nodded.

"Remember," he said, "that I am ready to act as relief directly I am needed.

"I'll remember that," said Mr. Willows.

"Here, Will, what are you doing?"

"Carrying Mr. Manners' tackle," said the lad.

"Oh! then you, Josh. Take the lantern for a bit."

"Not at all," said the Vicar, stoutly. "That little bit of duty I do cling to, and I am not going to surrender the light to any one. How are you feeling, Mr. Manners?"

"Fairly, thank you," was the response; "but I am thankful that the journey is not twice as far."

"Well, yes," said Mr. Willows, dryly. "We can do with it as short as it is. Have a rest now, sir?"

"No, no," said the artist; "not for a bit."

It was a slow march home indeed, and later frequent rests had to be indulged in.

"I say," said Will to Josh, "it's a pretty holiday, isn't it! Here, you take these things. Catch hold."

"All right."

The march was resumed.

"Drinkwater is a trump," said Will at last.

"Rather a surly one," said Josh.
"Why can't he be amiable?"

"I don't know."

"Whatever he says has got a sort of a sting in it."

"Hush! He'll hear."

"I wish he had."

"Look here, my man," said Mr. Carlile at last, "have a rest now for a bit. I will go on the other side of Mr. Manners."

"No, no, sir; I can manage, thank ye," said Drinkwater. "I am a strong one, you know, and it comes easy to such as me."

"So I see. But even the strong need rest, you know."

The man shook his head.

"I don't need no rest," he said. "I have worked hard all my life, and it won't hurt me to do a bit more."

"Hark at that," said Josh. "Old grampus!"

"Better leave him alone," said Willows. "He will have his own way. Don't interfere."

"Oh, very well," said the Vicar. "Want a rest, Mr. Manners?"

"No, no. We had better get on. What time is it?"

"Midnight—just after," said the mill-owner.

"Your wife will be anxious about you, Drinkwater," said the artist.

"Not she," was the response. "My wife knows me."

"Old stupid!" said Will. "As if we didn't know that! How could she help knowing him when she's his wife?"

"I wonder your father puts up with him as he does," said Josh.

"Yes; I often wonder that," said Will. "But then old Boil O does know such a lot. Look at to-night, for instance. Where should we have been without him?"

"That's why he thinks he can be disagreeable, I suppose," said Josh.

The cottage was reached at last, and evidently Mrs. Drinkwater had been waiting anxiously all the time. She came hurriedly down the garden path to meet the travellers.

"Oh, Mr. Manners," she said, "you have hurt yourself!"

"A trifle," he answered. "But you will know how to treat an injured ankle, Mrs. Drinkwater."

"I think I do, sir," said the woman, brightly, as she preceded the little party

into the cottage, and hastily put a cushion in the dark brown Windsor chair which stood sentry-like by the fire.

Into this the artist was helped.

"Thank you, gentlemen," he said, with a smile, as he gazed at his rescuers. "Thank you, boys, and you, Drinkwater—very sincerely, one and all. I am grateful. Astonishing how helpless an accident like this makes a man. Now with a cold compress and a rest I ought soon to be all right again."

"I trust so," Mr. Willows, with a smile, looking down at him; "only don't be in too much of a hurry to think you are well. It is a case for one remedy, and that is *r-e-s-t*. How are you going to get to bed? Shall I remain and assist?"

"It's only up two stairs, sir," said Mrs. Drinkwater, "and my man will help."

"Of course he will," said the artist. "I shall be quite all right. Good-night, friends, and a thousand thanks. One day may I be able to do as much for you."

"I'll take good care you don't," said Willows, with a laugh; and then as they started for home he clapped Will on the shoulder. "Your artist's a splendid fellow," he said.

CHAPTER VIII.

Drinkwater's Manners.

“**S**OON be able to walk all right ; eh, Mr. Manners ? ” asked Will, who with Josh had come up to the cottage.

“ Soon, my lad ? Yes, I think so,” said the artist, cheerily. “ I was talking to Drinkwater here about painting his portrait ; but he won’t hear a word of it. But I have got him in my mind’s eye all the same, and I shall paint him whether he likes it or not,” continued Mr. Manners, as he looked laughingly at the boys, and then went on dipping his brush in the colours on the palette, rubbing it round and twiddling it in the pigment, while his landlord, pipe in mouth, gazed at him rather surlily. “ Wouldn’t he make a fine picture ? Eh ? ” And the artist leaned back in his chair and smiled good-humouredly first at Drinkwater and then at the boys, ending by shaking his head at his injured ankle, which was resting on another chair placed nearly in front of him.

"I don't want my portrait painted, I tell ye," said the man, gruffly.

"Hark at him!" said Manners. "I should have thought he would be pleased."

"What's the matter, Boil O?" asked Will. "Did you get out of bed the wrong way this morning?"

"No, sir," said the man, shortly.

"Oh," said Will.

"Leave the sulky bear alone," put in Josh.

"Be quiet," said Will to his companion.

"I say, Boil O, old chap, when are you going to make me that fishing-rod you promised?"

"Oh, I have no time to make fishing-rods for boys," said the man. "I have to work."

"Look at him. How busy he is!" cried Will, with mock seriousness, while the artist made a vermilion smudge on his canvas as the ground plan of a sunset.

"No, sir, no time. Your father keeps me too busy."

"Shame," said Will. "Why, my father was saying only the other day that you had done so much good work for him all your life, that he would be very pleased to

see you take things a bit easier now ; so there."

"'Tain't true," said the man.

"What!" cried Will, his face growing very red. "Don't you believe what I say?"

"Not that exactly; but you don't know all I've done—no more than Mr. Willows does, nor Mr. Manners."

"Oh, doesn't he?" said Will.

"I know you to be a very faithful and good friend, Drinkwater," said the artist, making a dab, and then leaning back in his chair with his head on one side to judge the effect.

"Look at him," said Will, in a whisper, to Josh. "He always wags his head like that when he's at work painting. What does he do it for?"

"Oh, I heard what you said," continued the artist. "I do it because I can judge distance better that way. But as I was saying, Drinkwater here is a very good friend indeed, and if it had not been for his kindness, my little accident would have been twice as annoying as it is. Thanks to his help, I am able to go out painting and fishing all the same, and I am very grateful to him."

W.M.

"I don't want that, master," said the man. "I don't want thanks;" and he slouched off, leaving the boys and the artist to continue the conversation.

"Surly old toad!" said Will. "What's wrong with him?"

"Something must have put him out," said the artist.

"But he's always getting into his nasty tempers."

"Ah, well, he'll soon come round. He has been most thoughtful for me."

"But I say, Mr. Manners," said Josh, "you will be able to come fishing to-night, won't you?"

"Don't know," said the artist.

"Oh, yes," cried Will. "We will look after you; won't we, Josh?"

"Of course."

"All right, I'll come; but in a few days, you know, I shall be quite all right again."

"Hooray!" cried Will. "But I was forgetting: father sent me up here with his compliments, and he hopes you are going on A1."

"So did mine," said Josh.

"I am very grateful to Mr. Willows and

Mr. Carlile," said the artist. "Very kind of them to have thought of me."

Mr. Manners' prophecy was quite right. In a few days practically all trace of his unfortunate mishap on the Tor had vanished, and there followed not merely one fishing trip, but several, for the artist's chief recreation was throwing a fly, and one evening as he whipped the stream he turned quickly to the boys, who were a few yards away.

"See that?" he said.

"No," said Will. "Was it a bite?"

"No, no,—amidst those trees,—Drink-water."

"Oh," said Josh. "What about him?"

"I thought he wanted to speak to me," said the artist. "It looked as though he crept away because he saw you."

"Glad he's gone," said Will. "I don't want him. He's too plaguey disagreeable, isn't he, Josh?"

"Yes," said the lad addressed.

"No, no," said the artist. "I am afraid something's wrong. He was too good over my accident for me to run him down."

"Don't run him down then," said Will; "but he is getting to be an old curmudgeon all the same."

"He has been with your father a long time."

"What, old Boil O?" said Will, who had begun to draw in. "Oh, yes, years and years. He used to be a very good sort of a chap, but of late something's made him as cross as a bear."

"Perhaps he doesn't like you calling him Boil O," said the artist, taking out his book and carefully selecting a fresh fly, fastening the other in his hat.

"Oh, he doesn't mind that," said Will. "Besides, it's his name, or was his name before it was changed to Drinkwater."

"I wish I could find out what has upset him," said the artist.

"It's nonsense, Mr. Manners," said Will. "Old Boil O was always like that at times, and he's as close as—as anything. He gets some pepper in him somehow. But he will come round. He always does. It's just his way. He's a strange chap. Fancy his creeping about after you like that."

"I take it as a compliment," said the artist, smiling. "Drinkwater and I are very good friends."

"Well, my father likes him," said Will,

“and thinks he’s a very good workman, but his rough manners——”

“You are not speaking of me, I hope?” said the artist.

“Speaking of you! No. But my father says that he often feels irritated by him.”

“Ah!” said the artist, reflectively. “He never shows them to me when we have a pipe together at night. He is a very interesting character, Will. Of course, as somebody said, ‘Manners makyth man——’”

“Oh,” said Will, “I thought Manners made pictures.”

“No wonder you lost that fish,” said the artist, dryly, “if you waste your time making bad jokes.”

CHAPTER IX.

A Queer Character.

“**O**LD Boil O’s in a regular rage,” said Josh, laughing.

“Well, but he hasn’t been talking to you about it, has he?” replied Will.

“Yes; said your father must be getting off his head to go and buy up such a miserable ramshackle piece of rubbish. It was only fit to knock to pieces and sell for old copper.”

“Old Drinkwater had better keep his tongue quiet,” said Will, shortly, “or he’ll make my father so much off his head that he will give him what he calls the sack.”

“Nonsense! Your father would not turn away such an old servant as that.”

“He wouldn’t like to, of course,” said Will, loftily; “but Boil O has grown so precious bumptious, and he doesn’t care to do this, and he doesn’t care to do that. I believe he thinks he’s master of the whole place.”

“Well, he always was so ever since I can remember; but—tchah!—your father would not turn him away. My father says he is the

most useful man he ever knew. Why, he's just like what we say when we count the rye-grass: soldier, sailor, tinker, tailor—you know."

"Oh, yes, I know," said Will, "and he isn't soldier nor thief; but he can do pretty well everything, from making a box, plastering and painting, to mending a lock or shoeing a horse. But such impudence! My father mad, indeed! I think it was a very wise thing for him to do, to buy that engine so cheaply. The old mill's nearly all wood. Suppose it were to catch fire?"

"Bother!" said Josh. "Why hasn't it caught fire all these two hundred years since it was built?"

"Because everybody's been so careful," said Will. "But it might catch fire any day."

"Pigs might fly," said Josh. "Well, suppose it did. Haven't you got plenty of water to put it out?"

"Yes, but how are you going to throw it up to the top? Why, with that engine hose and branch, now old Boil O's put the pump suckers right, you could throw the water all over the place a hundred feet, I daresay, in a regular shower. Ha, ha, ha! I say, Josh, what a game!"

"What's a game?"

"Shouldn't I like to have the old thing out, backed up to the dam, with some of the men ready to pump—a shower, you know."

"Well, I suppose you mean something, but I don't understand."

"A shower—umbrella."

"Well, everybody puts up an umbrella in a shower."

"Yah! What an old thickhead you are!—old Manners sitting under his umbrella, and we made it rain."

Josh's face expanded very gradually into the broadest of grins, wrinkling up so much that it was at the expense of his eyes, which gradually closed until they were quite tightly shut.

"Oh, no," he said at last. "It would be a game, but"—he began to rub himself gently with both hands—"the very thought of it makes me feel as if my ribs were sore. He was such a weight."

"Yes, we mustn't play any more tricks; he's such a good chap. But about old Boil O—I don't like his turning so queer. He went on at me like a madman—I felt half frightened—said all sorts of things."

"What sort of things?"

"Oh, that father imposed upon him because he was a poor man, and set him to do all kinds of dirty jobs about the place because he was willing. Said he'd repent it some day. When you know father picks out those jobs for him because he's such a clever old chap and does the things better than the clumsy workmen from the town. But as for imposing upon him," said the boy, proudly, "father would not impose upon anybody."

"No, that he wouldn't. My father says he's the most noble-hearted, generous man he ever knew; he's always ready to put his hand in his pocket for the poor."

"So he is," cried Will. "Impose! Why, do you know what he pays old Boil O every week?"

"No."

"Then I shan't tell you, because that's all private; but just twice as much as he pays any of the other men."

"And he has that cottage rent-free, hasn't he?"

"Yes, and Mrs. Drinkwater makes a lot every year by letting her rooms to the artists who come down. She charges just what she likes, and the people are glad to pay it, because it's such a nice place, and

Mrs. Waters makes them so comfortable. Why, look at old Bad Manners—this is the third year he's been down to stay a couple of months. Now what has old Boil O got to grumble about."

"Nothing," said Josh; "only against himself. My father says that he was born in a bad temper. Why, he won't even say 'Good-morning' sometimes, only gives you a surly scowl or a snap as if he were going to bite."

"'Let dogs delight to bark and bite, for 'tis their nature to'—that's poetry. Hollo! What's the matter now?"

The two lads looked sharply round in the direction of the mill-yard, from whence a loud, strident voice was heard, saying something in angry tones, which rose at last to a passionate outburst, drowning the deep voice of someone responding, and echoing strangely from the high, cliff-like walls above the picturesque old mill.

"It's old Drink in one of his fits," said Josh. "Come on; let's see what's the matter."

Will had already started off at a dog trot, and the boys ran side by side towards the mill-yard, where quite a little group of the silk-weavers and their wives and daughters

were hurrying out to ascertain the cause of the trouble."

"Why, there's father there," said Josh.

"What is the matter now?" cried Will.

The next minute they knew, for, as they reached the spot where grave-looking John Willows stood looking like a patriarch amongst his people, beside his friend the gray-headed Vicar, a short, almost dwarfed, thick-set, large-headed man, with a shiny bald head fringed by grisly, harsh-looking hair,—and whose dark, wrinkled face was made almost repellent by the shaggy brows that overhung his fierce, piercing, black eyes—took a step forward menacingly, and holding out his left hand, palm upwards, began beating it with his right fist, fiercely shouting in threatening tones—

"It's been so from the first, John Willows, ever since I came to this mill as a boy. You've been a tyrant and a curse to all the poor, struggling people who spent their days under you, not as your servants, but as your slaves."

"Oh! Oh! Oh! No! No! No!" rose from the hearers, in a murmured chorus of protest.

"Silence there!" yelled the man, furiously,

"You cowardly fools! You worms who daren't speak for yourselves! Silence, I say, and let one who dares speak for you."

The Vicar stepped forward and laid his hand on the speaker's shoulder.

"Drinkwater, my good fellow! My good friend! Pray be calm. You don't know what you are saying!—you don't know what you are saying!"

"Oh, yes, I do, Parson. Don't you interfere," added the man, fiercely.

"But, my dear sir——"

"Oh, yes, I know! I know you, too, better than you know yourself. You belong to his set. You side with the money. Make friends with the mammon of unrighteousness, as you'd say, with that with which he grinds down all these poor, shivering wretches—money, money, money! Piling up his money-bags, and making us slaves!"

"Drinkwater, I cannot stand and listen to this without raising my voice in protest."

"Because it gives you a chance to preach," said the man, with a bitter sneer.

Will's father stepped forward, but the Vicar raised his hand.

"One moment, Mr. Willows," he said, quietly. "No, James Drinkwater," he went

on, gravely, "I raise my voice in protest, because everyone who hears you knows that what you say is utterly false. They are the angry words of an over-excited man. You are not yourself. You have let your temper get the better of you through brooding over some imaginary grievance, and to-morrow when you are calm I know from old experience that you will bitterly regret the insults you have heaped upon the head of as good and true-hearted a man as ever stepped this earth."

Drinkwater was about to reply, but he was checked by a fresh speaker, for Will suddenly threw up his cap high in the air with as loud a hurrah as he could utter, acting as fugleman to the group around, who joined in heartily, helped by Josh, in a cheer, strangely mingled, the gruff with the shrill of the women's voices.

"Well done!" whispered Will, half-bashfully shrinking back, and gripping his comrade's arm. "Oh, Josh, I never knew your father could preach like that!"

"Cowards! Pitiful, contemptible worms! That's right; put your necks lower under his heel. I'll have no more of it. From this day, after the words he's said to me this

morning, never another stroke of work I will do here."

"Stop, James Drinkwater," cried Will's father, firmly; "as the Vicar says, you are not yourself. Don't say more of the words of which you will bitterly repent, when you grow calm—when this fit has passed—and can see that the fault I found this morning was perfectly justified by your neglect, in a fit of temper, of a special duty—a neglect that might have resulted in a serious accident to the machinery, perhaps loss of life or limb to some of the people here."

"It's a falsehood," shouted the man. "If I left out those screws it was because I was dazed—suffering from overwork—work forced upon me that I was not fit to do, but heaped upon me to save your pocket and the blacksmith's bill."

"No," said John Willows, gravely; "I asked you to repair that engine because I knew it was a mechanical task in which you delighted to display your skill—because you would do it better than the rough smith of the town."

"Nay, it was to save your own pocket."

"That is untrue," said Mr. Willows, "and, if any of your fellow-workers like to go into

the office, the clerk will show them that a liberal payment, to show my satisfaction over the way the work was done, has been added as a bonus to your weekly wage."

Another cheer arose at this, which seemed to add fresh fuel to the angry fire blazing in the half-demented man's breast.

"Bah!" yelled Drinkwater, more furious than ever. "Oil! To smooth me down. But it's too late now. It has meant years of oppression, and the end has come. But don't think I mean to suffer like these cowardly worms. I too have been your worm for years, and the worm has turned at last—a worm that means to sting the foot that has trampled upon it so long. Here, what do you want, boy?" For Will had stepped forward, and thrust his hand through the man's arm.

"You, James, old chap. You come away. Mr. Carlile was right; you don't know what you are saying, or you wouldn't talk to father like that."

"Let go!" cried the man, fiercely trying to shake the boy off; but Will clung tightly.

"No—come and take his other arm, Josh—here, come on up to the cottage, Jem. What's the good of going on——"

Will did not finish his sentence, for a heavy

thrust, almost a blow, sent him staggering back towards Josh, who had hurried up, and was just in time to save his companion from a heavy fall.

This was too much for Will's father, whose calm firmness gave way.

"Yes," he said, angrily, "it does now come to that! You talk of putting an end to the oppression under which you seem to writhe. It shall be so. I, as your employer, tell you most regretfully, James Drinkwater, that from this day your connection with the mill must cease—I will not say entirely, for it would cause me bitter regret to lose so old and valued a servant; but matters cannot longer go on like this. In justice to others, as well as myself, this must come to an end. You have always been a difficult man with whom to deal, but, during the past six months, a great change has come over you, and I am willing to think that much of it is due to some failing in your health. There: I will say no more. This shall not be final, James. I speak for your wife's sake as well as your own. Go back to the cottage, and, if you will take advice, you will go right away for a month, or two, or three. You are not a poor man, as you have proved to me by your acts by coming to your bitter tyrant to invest your

little savings again and again. Now, sir, speak out as you did just now, so that all your fellow-workers may hear. Are not these words true?"

James Drinkwater stood alone out there in the bright sunshine, which glistened on his polished bare crown as he glared at his employer, whilst his hands kept on opening and shutting in company with his lips.

"Yes," he uttered, at last, in a low, fierce growl, "that's true enough. Why shouldn't I? Do you think I want to end my days in the Union when you kick me off like a worn-out dog? Yes, yes, I'll go; but look out. Long years of work have not crushed all the spirit out of your slave. Look out! Look out! The worm has turned, and the days are coming when you will feel its sting."

He snatched himself fiercely round, and made for the stony slope—half-rugged steps—which led upwards towards the dam, and the Vicar hurried after him; but hearing his steps, the man turned and waved him back, before striding along till he stopped suddenly in the middle of the great stone dam, raised his clenched hands towards the sunlit heavens, and then shook them at the group below.

The next minute he made a rush towards

the path leading upward towards his cottage, passing Mr. Manners, who was hurrying down, and disappeared amongst the trees.

"Why, hollo!" shouted the artist. "What's the matter with my landlord? I was going to strip for a swim. Has he turned mad? I thought he was going to jump in."

"I'm afraid that he ought to see a doctor," said the Vicar, gravely. "He is evidently suffering from a terrible fit of excitement," and as they joined Mr. Willows and the murmuring group of work-people below, he continued: "You see a great deal of him, Mr. Manners. Have you noticed anything strange in his ways?"

"Strange?" said the artist, bluffly. "Well, yes, he's always strange—a silent, morose sort of fellow. But I don't dislike him; he's a very straightforward, good man, who rather looks down on me. We hardly ever speak, but I have noticed that his wife has seemed a little more troubled than usual lately. I left her crying only just now, and asked what was the matter; but all I could get was that her husband was not well. What's been going on here? I heard him shouting as soon as I came outside."

“Ah! That sounds bad,” continued the artist, as soon as the Vicar had related the incident that had passed. “Poor fellow! He doesn’t drink, I know: sober as a judge. Temper—that’s what it is.”

“I don’t like to hear those threats,” said the Vicar.

“Pooh! Wind! Fluff! People say all sorts of things when they are in a passion, and threaten high jinks. I do sometimes, don’t I, boys? Take no notice, Mr. Willows. We are not going to have the peace of our happy valley spoiled because somebody gets in a fantigue. Well, boys, how does the fire-engine go?”

“Haven’t tried it yet,” said Will.

“H’m! Can’t we have a bit of a blaze? I should like to come and help to put it out.”

“I think we ought to have got it out to play on poor old Boil O, for he’s been quite red-hot.”

“Look here, young fellow, you’re rather fond of those little games, as I well know.”

The boys both looked very guilty, and turned scarlet.

“You take a little bit of advice. Don’t you try such a trick as that on him. It wouldn’t do.”

CHAPTER X.

Among the Trout.

THE next week passed, and the next, and more than one of the employés said a word or two to Will about how strange it seemed without James Drinkwater.

They were not alone, for Mr. Willows made the same remark to his son.

"The place doesn't seem the same, Will, without James in his old place. By the way, have you seen anything of him since?"

"Yes, father; Josh and I went up to take Mr. Manners some flies, and James was in the garden digging; but, as soon as he saw me, he slipped away round by the back, and went off into the woods. Josh said that he shied at me."

"But you, my boy? You didn't show any resentment for his behaviour to you?"

"I? Oh, no: not I, father; I didn't mind. I knew he was in a temper. I should have gone and shaken hands with him if he had stopped."

"Quite right, my boy. He'll be better

soon, and come back, like the true, honest fellow he is, and ask to be taken on."

"But what about his threats, father?"

"Pooh!" ejaculated Mr. Willows. "Mr. Manners was right."

One afternoon Josh came down as usual from the Vicarage, rod in hand.

"What about fishing, Will?" he said. "There's a lot of fly out on the upper waters. Get your rod, and let's rout out old R.A., and see if we can't show him some better sport than we had the other evening."

"Ah, yes," said Will. "I believe he thought we took him where there wasn't a fish, just to play him a trick."

"Yes, that comes of getting a bad character," said Josh. "He'll be treating us like the shepherds did the boy in the fable who cried 'Wolf!'"

"Oh, bother! There were plenty of fish up there, only they had been having a good feed, and wouldn't rise."

The boy hurried off to where his long, limber, trout rod was resting on three hooks, all ready with winch, taper line, and cast, under the eaves of the mill-shed nearest to the water.

"What flies are you going to try?" said Josh.

"Oh, black gnats."

"No, I wouldn't," said Josh. "Red spinner is the one for to-night."

"Ah, to be sure! Have you got any?"

"Have you?"

"Not one; but you have, or else you would not have proposed them."

"Come on; but I say, doesn't it look black!" said Josh.

"Yes, we shall have some rain to-night, I think," said Will; "and if it does come down and Bad Manners gets wet, he'll think it another trick!"

The boys shouldered their rods, and went up upon the dam, whose waters looked deep and dark, and smooth as glass, save where here and there a big trout quietly sucked down some unfortunate fly, forming ever-expanding rings on the mirror-like surface.

"My! There's a whopper!" cried Josh, as the fish broke the surface with a loud smack.

"What are you going to do?" cried Will.

"Do? Why, have a few throws; they are rising splendidly."

"More reason why we should fetch old Manners."

"All right," said Josh, securing his fly again to one of the lower rings of his rod, shouldering it, and following his companion along the ascending path leading to the cottage.

They had passed along the second of the zig-zags when, at the third turn, they came suddenly upon Drinkwater standing in the shade of a drooping birch, gazing intently down upon the mill.

The boys were close upon him before he heard their steps, and then, starting violently, he wrenched himself round, leaped actively upon a heap of stones at his side, seized one of the hanging boughs, dragged himself up, and dived at once into the dense undergrowth, disappearing with a loud rustling amongst the bracken.

"All right, old chap!" said Will, cavalierly, "just as you like! But you are fifty, and I wouldn't behave like a sulky boy."

"Oh, take no notice," said Josh. "Father says that he is sure to come round."

"Not going to," said Will. "Come along."

Ten minutes later they reached the cottage

gate, to find Drinkwater's sad-looking, patient-faced wife looking anxiously over the hedge.

"How are you, Mrs. Waters?" cried Will, cheerily. "We haven't come for tea this time. We are going to catch some trout—a good creelful—for you to cook."

"I hope you will, my dears," said the woman, gently. "Mr. Manners was sadly disappointed the other night. He said he thought that you had played him another trick."

"There, what did I say?" cried Will. "Is he in his room?"

"No, my dears; he's painting down by the birches, below the cave."

"All right," cried Will. "Look here; I'll take his rod and basket."

The creel was hanging from a nail beneath the cottage porch, and the rod stood up like a tall reed with its spear stuck in one of the garden beds; and, quite at home, Will took them from their resting-places, swung the creel strap across his back, laid the rod alongside his own over his shoulder, and then walked sharply on along familiar paths, with a booming noise growing louder and louder

as they progressed, till at one of the turns of the stream they came full in sight of the great fall where the water was thundering down into the rocky hollow it had carved, and a faint mist of spray rose to moisten the overhanging ferns.

"Big mushroom, Josh!" cried Will, pointing to the great, open umbrella. "What shall we do? Say we are coming with a stone?"

"No, no," said Josh; "no larks now."

"Well, I could hit it like a shot," said Will, picking up a rounded pebble.

"Why, so could I, if you come to that," said Josh.

"Not you! Come, let's try."

"No, no; I don't want to tease him. Let's get him on to fish."

"You couldn't hit it," said Will.

"All right; think so if you like," said Josh, and Will sent his stone flying with a tremendous jerk right away into the trees beyond the stream.

"Coo—ey!" he shouted. "Mr. R.A. ! Ahoy !"

"Don't!" cried Josh.

"Why?"

"He won't like it. Father says that he

told him once that he was sadly disappointed that he had not had more success with the pictures he sent to town."

"Poor old chap!" said Will. "Well, I suppose they were not very good."

"That's what father thinks," said Josh.

"How does he know?" said Will.

"Oh, he says that if they were good they wouldn't all come back."

"Well, R.A. goes on painting them all the same," said Will. "Coo—ey! Mr. Manners, ahoy!"

This time the artist looked up, rose from his seat, stretched himself, and waved his palette in the air.

"Hollo, young 'uns," he said, as they came up; "off fishing again?"

"Yes," said Will, "and I've brought your rod."

"Very much obliged to you," said the artist, sarcastically. "But not this time, thank you; I would rather paint."

"Oh—h!" cried Will. "Do come! I've brought your basket too."

"To put nothing in, eh? No, not this time, thanks."

"But it's a good evening, Mr. Manners, and the fish are rising splendidly."

"Honour?" cried the artist, with a searching look.

"Bright!" cried Josh, earnestly.

"All right, then. Here, I want to put in that little bit of sunlight, and then I'll come. How do you think it looks?" he said, resuming his seat and beginning to paint once more.

The boys were silent for a few moments, as they examined the picture critically.

"Lovely," said Will, at last.

"Yes," said Josh; "I like it better than that last you did."

"Mean it, boys?"

"Why, of course!" said the lads together.

"Hum! Hum! Yes, it isn't so bad as usual," said the artist, sadly. "I may say it is pretty. But that's all. I have tried very hard, but there is nothing great in my stuff. I suppose I haven't got the right touch in me. But never mind; painting has given me many a happy day amongst the most beautiful scenes in creation, and I suppose that I oughtn't to grumble if it gives me honest pleasure instead of coin. Why, it has made me friends, too, with a pair of as reckless young ruffians as ever gloried in playing a trick. My word, Josh, I must be

a good man! If I hadn't a better temper than your friend Drinkwater, Master Will, I should have loosened both your skins with a good licking more than once."

"Well, don't do it now," said Will, grinning. "Mine feels quite loose enough, and I want you to come and fish."

"Brought my rod, then, have you? But what am I to do with my traps?"

"Fold up the umbrum," said Will, "and I'll climb up here and stuff them into the cave. Then they'll be out of the wet when the rain comes."

"Ah, to be sure," said the artist. "Capital! But it isn't going to rain."

"It is," said Will, decisively. "Look yonder: the old Tor's got his nightcap on."

"So he has," cried the artist, eagerly, as he looked up at the mountainous top, miles away, nearly hidden by a faint white mist. "Here, hold hard a minute; I must dash that in my picture."

"No, no," cried the boys, in a breath. "You can do that any time. Come on."

"Well, it seems a pity," said the artist, "but somehow you two always make me feel quite a boy again and ready to take holiday and play. There, put away my traps."

A few minutes later, umbrella, easel, and colour-box were safely stowed away in a narrow opening in the face of the limestone rock, and the three were trudging on upwards to a mighty bend. There a great rift opened out into a wide amphitheatre, where, shallow and bright with flashing stickle, the stream danced among the stones, to calm down directly after in deep pool after pool, which looked like so many silvery mirrors netted by the rings formed by the rising fish.

"Now, Mr. Manners," cried Josh, "what do you say to that? Are there any trout in Willows' waters?"

"Yes, splendid! We ought to get some fish to-night. Here, where are your creels?"

"Haven't brought them," said Will. "We are going to help fill yours."

And they did, for the fish rose to nearly every cast, quarters and half-pounders, the artist to his great delight landing two both well over a pound, for it was one of those evenings when, as if warned by their natural instinct of a fast to come, the trout rose at every fly, taking in their heedless haste the artificial as well as the true, and only finding their mistake when gasping out their brief life upon the bracken laid at the bottom of the artist's creel.

The trio fished on till the creel was nearly full, so intent upon their sport that they paid no heed to the gathering clouds, Nature's harbingers of the storm about to break among the hills, till a bright flash of light darted down the vale, followed almost instantaneously by a mighty crash, which went roaring and rumbling on in echoes, to die distantly away.

"Hold on!" shouted Will. "Look sharp; we shall have to run. It'll be wet jackets as it is. I say, Mr. M., lucky I put away your traps! Wasn't I right?"

"Right you were, young 'un," cried the artist, making a whizzing noise as he wound up his multiplying winch. "But I'm not going to bark my shins running amongst these stones. Now then, boys. 'Tention! Shoulder rods! Right face! March!" And he led off at a rapid rate down by the side of the stream. "Here, lads, that's heavy," he cried at the end of a few minutes, just as the rain began to make chess pawns upon the surface of the pools. "I'll carry it now."

"No, no," cried Will. "But let's shelter here for a few minutes. It's only going to be a shower now."

He ran into where a great mass of slatey-looking rock stood out from the perpendicular side of the gorge, heedless of the fact that it necessitated splashing in through the shallow water, which nearly covered his boots.

"Nice dry spot this," said the artist, laughing, as they stood in the ample shelter.

"Oh, it is only wetting one's feet," said Will. "We are quite dry upstairs."

"Oh, I don't mind," said the artist. "My word! It is coming down. How it hisses! But you are right: it won't last long."

In less than half an hour the sky was nearly clear again, but water enough had fallen to make the stream which rushed by their feet rise full five inches, bringing forth the remark from Josh that they were getting it warmly higher up in the hills.

Possibly he alluded to the lightning, for flash after flash divided the heavens in zig-zag lines, though none seemed to come near them, and they were soon after tramping on, wet-footed only, back towards Vicarage, cottage, and mill.

"I say, hark at the fall!" cried Will, as they neared the spot where they had picked up their friend.

"Yes, it is coming down," said Josh.

"Well, your father wanted it."

"Yes," said Will; "the dam was getting low. I say, Mr. Manners, I told old Mother Waters to get her frying-pan ready, for there'd be some fish."

"Yes, and you were right this time," said the artist; "but I'm not going to take in all these. Here, Will, pick out four brace of the best."

"Shan't!" said Will, shortly. "We get quite as many as we want. Take them all in yourself. One moment—send Mr. Carlile up some instead. Here, come on; it's going to rain again. My! Isn't the fall thundering down!"

Will was right. Another heavy shower was coming over from the hills; but it did not overtake the party before they had all reached home, and then Nature made up for a long dry time by opening all her reservoirs, to fill pool, gully, and lynn, the waters roaring for hours down the echoing vale, till the next morning the placid stream was one foaming torrent that seemed to threaten to bear away every projecting rock that stood in its way, while every sluice was opened at the mill to relieve the pressure of the overburdened dam.

CHAPTER XI.

A Night Gossip.

AS has been pointed out, the artist was a quiet man, and the tranquil life of the little village was exactly to his taste. Mrs. Drinkwater looked well after his few wants, and until the disturbance at the mill, when Drinkwater had been turned off, there had been nothing to trouble him. Since that occurrence, however, he had frequently come across his landlady with traces of tears in her eyes, and that evening when after parting with the two lads he reached the pretty cottage, she came out to meet him at the gate.

"Oh, Mr. Manners, sir," she said, "I'm afraid—I'm afraid——"

"Afraid what of, Mrs. Drinkwater?"

"I'm afraid that something's happened to my man. He has not been home to-day."

The artist led the poor woman into the kitchen.

"Sit down, Mrs. Drinkwater," he said,

kindly. "Now just listen to me. I, too, am deeply concerned about Drinkwater. Can't you reason with him—make him see how wrong all this behaviour is, and convince him that he has only one sensible thing to do, namely, go and ask pardon of Mr. Willows?"

"Oh, I do wish I could, sir; but Jem won't listen to me. He might listen to you, sir."

"Ah, but you see this is not my business, Mrs. Drinkwater."

"No, sir, but he respects you, and he might perhaps pay attention to what you said."

"Maybe," said the artist, thoughtfully. "Well, I will see what I can do."

"Thank you, sir—thank you!"

"When did you see him last?"

"It's two days ago now, sir."

"Well, Mrs. Drinkwater, we must hope for the best. I have always found your husband willing and obliging up to quite recently. It seems to me that if matters are put to him in a quiet common-sense way he will listen. Hang it all, he will have to listen! We can't have you crying

your eyes out because he chooses to behave like a brute to you."

"Oh, my Jem really means well, sir," said the woman; "I know he does. He has always been a good husband to me."

Late that evening the artist thought over affairs. It was a pleasant soft summer night, and when he was alone he quietly opened the cottage door, and lighting his pipe, sat down on the little rustic seat which was just outside. There was hardly a sound—nothing but the night wind sweeping through the valley, the far-off splash of water, the purring noise of a big moth as it flew past and then hovered a second, attracted by the gleam of the artist's pipe.

There was a step, loud and heavy, and Manners started to his feet as a burly figure suddenly appeared just in front of him.

"Hallo, Drinkwater!" he cried. "You, my man?"

"Me it is, Mr. Manners."

"Oh, that's all right. I was wanting to see you."

"Wanting to see me? What for?" said the man, gruffly.

"Oh, for several reasons. I don't like my landlord to go off for days together, nobody knows where."

"Not wanted now," said the man, sourly — "Nobody wants me now."

"That's not a fact, Drinkwater," said the artist, firmly. "Not a bit true. To begin with, I want you."

"Pictures to see too?"

"No, not pictures. I just want to talk to you; that's all. Have you got your pipe? Oh, I see you have. Here's my pouch. Come, fill and light up, and sit down here. It's a lovely night, isn't it?"

"Humph!" grunted the man, as he obeyed and began to smoke.

"Now," said the artist, cheerily, after a few minutes' silence, "what's wrong with you? At least, I need not ask that. You have quarrelled with your old friend and employer, for no reason, and it's no end of a pity, I can assure you. You will not mind my speaking out plainly like this, as man to man, for I have known you a long time now; and besides, I'm under a debt to you for helping me that night."

"Humph!" said the man again.

"Now," said the artist, "has all this sulking done you any good?"

"Good!" growled the man. "Good! No. There has been no good in my life. I have slaved it all away for a thankless taskmaster."

"Bah!" said the artist, with a laugh. "Mr. Willows a taskmaster! Why, it's too absurd! He's one of the very best men that ever lived; and in your heart of hearts you know it, Drinkwater. You know it quite well."

"I want revenge," said the man.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the artist. "Revenge! Why, Drinkwater, it's really funny. Revenge! What are you going to do? Blow up the mill?"

"Eh?" said the man, shifting uneasily in his seat and turning to stare at his companion. "Blow up the mill? What, me?"

"There, there," said Manners, "I didn't mean it. It was only a joke. Think it over, Drinkwater. Think it over," he continued, as the man rose; and the artist held out his hand, but whether it was the darkness which prevented his seeing the gesture, or for some other reason, the

hand was not taken, and a moment later the man had entered the cottage, while the artist got up to follow him, for it was very late and he was tired.

“What has he got in his head?” he mused. “I don’t like his manner at all.”

CHAPTER XII.

On the Watch.

JOSH and the Vicar were down at the mill in good time the next morning, to find Will and his father in the bright sunshine under a cloudless sky, on the bank overlooking the wide pool, and, just as they reached them, with a hearty "Good-morning!" Manners came up.

Overhead, all was bright and clear, and, from Nature's newly washed face, a fresh, sweet scent rose into the air; but the lower part of the valley seemed quite transformed. Sluices and waterfalls were gushing down everywhere, making for the main stream, which added to the general roar of water as it rushed along, racing for the overcharged river far away.

Every moment some fresh sign of the mischief which had been done by the flood glided by. The stream was no longer crystal-like and clear, but turgid with the soil swept from high up the banks; leaves, twigs, broken branches, and even trees, mostly root

upwards, went bobbing by, every now and then to become anchored for a few moments amongst the stones, and forming some little dam which kept the water back till there was weight enough to overcome the obstacle and send it onwards with a rush.

"Well," cried Manners, in his bluff way, "how is it, Mr. Willows? I woke up this morning, looked out of the window, and then dressed in a hurry, to hurry down, half expecting that the mill had been swept away."

"I, too," said the Vicar, "felt a bit nervous; the storm was awful, and I wondered whether such a weight of waters might not have made an opening somewhere in your dam."

"Well, to be candid," said Mr. Willows, "I woke long before daybreak and came out with Will here to see how we stood. But we are all right. My ancestors were simple men, but what they did they did with all their hearts. It must have been very slow work year by year, the quarrying and bringing down all these stones; but they planted them well, the lime they burned was of the best, and it is harder now than the stone itself. The dam has stood two hundred years, and it is so solid that it looks as if it would stand two hundred more."

"Then we are all right," cried Manners, heartily.

"Yes, *we* are all right," said Mr. Willows, smiling and holding out his hand; "and this is nice and neighbourly of you, a stranger, Mr. Manners, to speak like this."

"Neighbourly?" said Manners, colouring through his well-tanned skin. "Oh, I don't know about that. Only, you see, coming down year after year, and seeing so much of the boys, one seems to know you all so well."

"Exactly," said the Vicar, smiling; "Willows is quite right; it is neighbourly, or we will say brotherly, if you like."

"No, no, no!" cried the artist. "Here, I'll tell you what to say—nothing. But I am heartily glad there is no serious mischief done."

"None at all," said Willows. "Rather good. The big pool was getting very low. Now we shall be all right for months. The water's falling fast, and in half an hour I shall have the waste water-slucies closed, and by mid-day the stream will be running much as usual."

"That's right," cried Manners. "I say, boys; lucky we had our fishing last night."

Why, every trout will have been washed down-stream and out to sea."

"Not one," cried Will. "Will they, father?"

"No, my boy; I don't suppose they will; they'll have got into the eddies and backwaters, driven down a good deal here and there; but their natural habit is to make their way higher and higher up to the shallows in search of food. There, Mr. Manners, I don't think that you'll miss any of your sport. My experience is that places which swarm with trout one day are empty the next, and vacant spots where you have thrown a fly in vain will another time give you a fish at nearly every cast."

"Well," said Manners, "as I have had my fright for nothing, my nature's beginning to assert itself, and the main question now with me is breakfast. Now, boys, will you come and join me? I can't smell them, but I can almost venture to say for certain that Mrs. Drinkwater is frying trout. What do you say?"

"No, thank you, Mr. Manners," replied Will; "my father will want me, perhaps, to give orders to the men; but Josh has got to pass the cottage."

"Of course," cried Manners; "and you might honour me too, Mr. Carlile."

"Thanks, no," said the Vicar. "Josh can stay, and he will be glad. I'll go on, for they would be waiting breakfast at home."

The artist gave a tug at a thick chain, and dragged out a heavy, old-fashioned, gold watch.

"Five o'clock," he cried. "We should be done by six. Why, you'd be quite ready for a second breakfast, sir, by eight or nine."

"Do come, father."

"Very well," said the Vicar, smiling; and the artist carried them off, leaving Willows with his son to walk slowly on to the broad dam where the foam-covered water brimmed the stones, as if only wanting the impulse of a puff of wind to sweep over the top.

They stopped about the middle, to stand looking up the vale.

"I say, father, do you feel that?" cried Will.

"What?—the quivering sensation, my boy?"

"Yes; it is just as if the water was shaking the stones all loose."

"Yes, but it is only the vibration caused by the water rushing through the open sluices

on either side ; they are open as wide as they will go, and have just been large enough to do their work well and keep the flood down. I fully expected to find it foaming over the top. What are you looking at ? ”

“ Don’t take any notice, father. I’m going to look away. Just turn your eyes quietly up to the old stone bench on the top there by the look-out.”

There was a pause of a moment or two, during which the mill-owner stooped to pick up a piece of sodden, dead wood, to throw it outward into the current tearing through one of the open sluices. Then turning right away, he said, quietly—

“ Yes, there’s someone’s face looking over from the back. Who can it be ? ”

“ Can’t you see, father ? ”

“ No ; unless it’s James.”

“ It is, father ; I saw his face just now quite clear. What does he want there ? Does he want to speak to you about coming back ? ”

“ Hardly so soon as this, my boy,” said Will’s father, rather sadly. “ Brought here by curiosity, I suppose, like our other friends—a good sign, Will. He takes an interest in the old mill, after all.”

CHAPTER XIII.

The Alarm.

A FORTNIGHT had glided by. The dam was kept more than full by hours of stormy weather high up in the hills many miles away; but the stream had resumed its gentle course, the trout were back in their old haunts, Manners had finished one of his landscapes and begun another, and one soft, sweet, very early autumn evening three busy pairs of hands were at work at the round table plainly visible in the light cast by Mrs. Drinkwater's shaded lamp.

"No," said Will, who was holding something in a pair of pliers in his left hand, and winding a thread of silk brought up from the mill round it with his right, "he hasn't been near us yet. Josh and I keep running against him in the woods, or up one of the river paths; but, as soon as he sees us, he turns his back and goes in among the trees."

"Shies at us," interpolated Josh.

"Yes," said Will, softly, as he wound away, his face screwed up and looking intent

to a degree "shies! I say, Mr. Manners, you, living here, see him every day, of course?"

"No, I don't," said the artist. "He has his breakfast before I'm down, and goes off and doesn't come back till after dark. The missus, poor soul, told me yesterday—crying away like your old mill-wheel—that he takes a bit of bread and cheese with him and goes off to sit and mope somewhere in the woods. He never hardly speaks to her. She said, poor thing, that she'd give anything to see him back at his regular work."

"Ha!" cried Will, holding up the something proudly upon which he had been at work. "Now, I call that something like a coachman."

"Not a bit," said Josh. "How can a little hook, a thread of gut, a few small feathers, and some dubbing, be like a coachman?"

"Get out, Clevershakes! What an old chop-logic you are! I didn't christen that kind of artificial fly a coachman; but it's a well-made one, isn't it, Mr. Manners?"

"Well, yes, very nicely made; but it's not a London maker's idea of a jarvey."

"No," said Will, "but it's the sort that

will catch the fish. You'd never guess whose make that is."

"Why, it's yours, my lad."

"Yes; but you don't know who taught me."

"Not I; but I should like you to make me half a dozen more."

"All right; I will; a dozen, if you like. They suit our waters fine. That's old Boil O's pattern. He taught me; he used to say that the proper way to make a fly was to watch the real one first, and make it as near as you could like that—not take a copy from somebody's book."

"Quite right," said the artist; "old Boil O's a philosopher."

"I wish he was a sensible man instead," said Will. "I've been thinking, Mr. Manners, that as you live here and know him so well——"

"That I don't," cried the artist. "I never knew less of any man in my life."

"Well, never mind that; you live here, and I think it would be very nice if you'd get hold of him and talk sensibly, like you can."

"Thank you for the compliment, my young judge."

"I say, don't poke fun, Mr. Manners; I want to talk seriously."

"That's right; I like to hear you sometimes, my young joker. I wouldn't give a sou for a fellow who was all fun."

"Well, look here, Mr. Manners; I want you to let him see what a jolly old stupid he is making of himself. Of course father can't come and ask him to return to work, but I know that dad would shake hands with him at once, and be as pleased as Punch."

"Well," said the artist, dryly, "I can't quite see in my own mind your grave and reverend parent looking as pleased as Punch; it doesn't seem quite in his way."

"Of course not; but you know what I mean."

"Well, I guess at it, boy; and you mean what is quite right. I should be very glad to do anything for either of you, and to put an end to a melancholy state of affairs; but look here, my dear boy, I don't think that I should be doing right as an outsider, such a bird of passage as I am, to say more to Drinkwater than I have already done. He knows what I think; but I want to be friends with everybody here, and I feel sure that by interfering further I should be turning my

landlord into an enemy. I am obliged to say 'No.' And now, if you please, we'll go on with our fly-making, and get our tackle ready for another turn at the trout."

"Well, I am very sorry," said Will, sadly, "and——"

"Whatever's that?" cried Josh, springing to his feet and staring wildly through the open window.

"Eh? Whatever's what?" said the artist, slowly, looking in the same direction.

"Why, as Pat would say, it isn't to-morrow morning, and the sun never rises in the west, or he'd be getting up now. Why, by all that's wonderful, it's——"

"Fire! Fire!" shouted Will, wildly.

"Yes," cried Josh, in a husky voice, "and it's at the mill."

CHAPTER XIV.

Good Servant—Bad Master.

THERE was no stopping to put away artificial fly material. Hat and caps were snatched up, and the next minute all three were running as fast as the rugged stones and the dangerous nature of the path would allow, downward towards the mill, their faces suffused by the warm glow which rose from out of the valley beyond the trees.

For a few moments the pat, pat of the runners' feet, and the rattle and rush of the stones they dislodged were the only sounds to be heard. Then came a loud shout from below, a confused murmur of voices, the wild shriek of a woman, followed by the hoarse voice of a man, shouting "Fire! Fire!" the last time to be drowned by the loud clang of the mill's big bell, whose tongue seemed to be giving its utterances in a wild, hysterical way, as rope and wheel were set in motion by a pair of lusty arms.

There were a couple more zigzags to descend, which never had seemed so long

to Will before, and meanwhile the buzz of voices, mingled with shouted orders, grew louder and more confused.

“Shall we never get there?” panted Will.

“Take it coolly, my boy,” cried the artist.

“Steady! Cool! Steady!” snapped out Will. “Who can be cool at a time like this?”

“You,” said Manners, “and you must. We don’t want to get there pumped out and useless in an emergency. We want to help.”

“Ha!” panted Josh, as if satisfied with their friend’s utterance, and feeling that it exactly expressed his feelings.

“Oh, the poor old mill!” cried Will, as the next minute they came full in sight of the long wooden range of buildings, up one end of which, as if striving to reach the bell turret, great tongues of fire were gliding steadily in a ruddy series, licking at board and beam as they pursued their way.

Just then a thought struck Will, and he breathlessly shouted—

“The engine! The engine! Who says my father was foolish now?”

“I say he was a Solomon,” cried Manners.

“Hurrah, boys! Let’s have the engine out! Plenty of water! Take it coolly; we’ll soon have her going now.”

He had hardly finished speaking when John Willows' voice rose loudly above the babble of the little crowd, giving orders ; and, as the boys rushed up with their friend, an iron bar was heard to rattle, two doors were flung back, and the grinding and crushing sound of wheels over gravel followed, as the little engine was run out with a hearty cheer ; the excited men who took the place of horses and pushed wherever they could find a place for their hands, running the machine along the mill front right up towards where the fire was blazing fast, and bringing to it a current of air as it rose, which made the flames burn moment by moment more fiercely, as they obtained a greater hold.

"No, no, no !" yelled Will. "You're wrong, you're wrong, you're wrong ! Back with her at once !"

"Nay, it's all right, boys," cried one of the men ; "it's all right ; go on !"

"It isn't," shouted Will. "Back with her close to the dam !"

"Nay," cried the same voice ; "the fire's here."

"I know that !" shouted Will, rushing at him and thrusting him aside. "Ah, here's father ! Give orders, father ; it must be

close to the water. The suction-pipe is short."

"Yes, of course," cried Willows. "You're wrong, men. Back with her to the pool there below the wheel! Mr. Manners, take the lead, please, over getting out and connecting the hose. Will, see to the suction-pipe, and that its rose is well clear of the gravel. Get to work as soon as you can. Josh, my boy, follow and help me. I'm afraid the place is doomed, Mr. Manners; I must go to the office and get out the safe and books."

"Right, sir; we will do our best," cried the artist. "How did it occur?"

"Goodness only knows," was the reply, and each hurried to his appointed task.

They worked well, but, as a matter of course, there was little discipline; every worker thought he knew best, gave his opinions, and hindered the progress of the rest; but at last the engine was in the most favourable place for operating, the suction-pipe attached and hanging down in a deep, dark hole, scooped lower year after year by tons of the water falling from the wheel; while forward, under the artist's guidance, length after length of the hose had been unrolled

and the gun-metal screws fitted together till it stretched out far in the glowing light towards the burning timbers. Here, as near as it was safe for man to go, the artist stood in shirt and trousers, sleeves rolled up over his massive arms, bending down, a picturesque object, like some gladiator fitting his weapon before doing battle with the fiery monster wreathing upwards above his head, as he screwed on the glistening copper branch.

“Ready!” he roared, as Will’s father and Josh came out of the open office door laden with heavy ledgers.

“All right!” shouted Will. “Now, boys, all together—pump!”

Cling, clang! Cling, clang! Cling clang! Three times over, the handles rose and fell with a strange, weird sound, and then, as if moved by one impulse, the workers stopped, and, sounding strangely incongruous, a man whose voice was blurred by the north-west country burr shouted—

“Why, t’owd poomp wean’t soock!”

“Nay,” cried another; “I never had no faith in t’owd mawkin of a thing. She’s only fit to boon the roads.”

“What’s the matter?” shouted Manners.

"I don't know," cried Will, despondently ;
"it won't go."

"Are the pipes screwed on right?" said Manners.

"Yes."

"Is your end down in the water?"

"Yes; three or four feet."

"We must have got something screwed on upside down."

"No," said Will, firmly; "it's all right, just as old Boil O put it together when it was done."

"But it isn't all right," cried Manners; "the suckers or something must have been left out."

"Oh, why didn't we try it? Why didn't we try it when it was done?" groaned Will.
"I did want to, but Boil O said there was no time for me to be playing my games."

At that moment Mr. Willows ran up.

"Well," he cried, "why don't you pump?"

"We did, father, but it won't go."

"Then don't waste time. Here, Manners!"

"Catch hold," shouted the artist, thrusting the copper branch into the nearest man's hands and running up. "Yes!" he said.

"Ladders and buckets," continued Mr. Willows.

"Right, and form a double line. I say," he whispered; "here's treachery."

"I fear so; I fear so," said Willows, in the same tone. "It's revenge, and the engine has been purposely left out of gear. No," he cried, as if in agony, his words having given him intense pain; "I won't believe a man could be so base."

There was the scuffling rush of feet just then, and the object of his thoughts, wild and weird-looking from his dwarfish aspect, glistening head, and staring eyes, dashed up.

"Here, fools! Idiots! Are you going to let the poor old mill burn down?"

"Hurrah!" shouted Will; "here's Boil O! Here, old fellow, what is there wrong? I can't get the thing to go."

"Stand aside!" cried the man, fiercely; and the next moment he was down on his knees, rapidly examining the connections, valve, piston, and rod. "Yah!" he roared, savagely. "The pins are left out here."

Clang went a box, as he threw up a lid in the front, snatched out a screw hammer and a copper pin, and then, *tap, tap, tap*, some half-dozen sharply given blows were heard, the hammer was thrown with a crash

back into the box, and the man's hoarse, harsh voice rose in an angry roar.

"Now, then, put your backs into it! Pump!"

Clink, clank! Clink, clank! Clink, clonk! Clink, clunk!

There was a whishing sound as the water forced the wind out of the leather tubes, rushed along spurting in fine threads out of a score of tiny holes, and from the joints where they were not tightly screwed up, and then, just as, seeing what was about to happen, Manners rushed forward and grasped the copper branch, a fountain as of golden rain darted out of the glistening branch, rose higher and higher, making the flames hiss and steam, and a roar of triumph rose above the thudding, steady clank of the engine, now doing well its work, while the north-country man who had spoken jeeringly before shouted lustily—

"Three cheers, boys, for good old Boil O!"

CHAPTER XV.

It's a Mystery.

THERE was a desperate fight now for about a quarter of an hour between man's two best slaves—fire and water; and John Willows looked anxiously on, asking himself the question, which was to win. At the end of the above-mentioned time, in spite of the inflammable nature of the old building, the matter was no longer in doubt. The men worked away nobly at the clanging pumps, and every now and then in her eager excitement, some sturdy, strong-armed woman made a run forward to thrust husband or brother aside and take his place, working with a will, and sending quite a hissing deluge to flood the untouched parts of the roof, and gradually fight back the flames foot by foot, till their farther progress was stopped, and the rest was easy.

All through the fight, Manners held his post right in the forefront, his face shining in the golden glow as he distributed the water. Will and Josh kept close up after the books

had been saved, always ready to help, and bringing refreshment, while Drinkwater raged about like some lunatic, thrusting the men here and there, urging them on to pump faster, and nearly getting himself crushed over and over again, as he dodged about with a small oil-can, seeking to lubricate the old and stiffened parts of the machinery.

It was all to save the mill from destruction, and the master from injury from whom he had cut himself adrift, and there was the result at last. The ruddy light which had illumined the fern-hung sides and curtains of ivy of the great gorge began to fail.

The great, black cloud of smoke which hung over from side to side began to turn from ruddy orange to a dull lead colour, and at last the word was given to cease pumping.

"There's nothing to do now, my lads, but to carry a few buckets inside and look out for sparks," cried Willows. "I thank you all! You've worked grandly, and you have saved our old mill."

"There'll be a big sore place upon it to-morrow, master," said one of the men.

"Nothing but what James Drinkwater and three or four workmen," said Willows, speaking meaningly, "can put right within a

month. The machinery at this end seems to be uninjured."

"I hope so," said Manners, "but the lads here and I have given it a tremendous washing where we sent the stream in through yon hole and those broken windows. What about the silk? Will it be spoiled?"

"There was little there to signify, and the loss will be comparatively small. Now then, everyone round to the big office, and let's see what we can do in the way of finding you all something to eat and drink."

There was another burst of cheers, and soon after, while the men and women were partaking of the mill-owner's cheer, he and his friends had been making such examination as the smoke, the darkness, and the water which had flooded the drenched part of the building would allow.

"Terrible damage, Carlile," he said. "Still nothing compared to what might have been. But what has become of Drinkwater? Who saw him last?"

"I think I did, father," cried Will. "He was busy with a lantern down there by the engine, wiping and oiling the different parts. I asked him to come in, but he only grunted and shook his head."

"That's where I found him," chimed in Josh, "when you sent me with a message, father."

"Yes, and I saw him there," said Manners. "My word, how he kept the pumpers up to the mark! The water never failed once. Why, you got quite a bargain in the old engine, Mr. Willows, and that fellow did it up splendidly."

"And worked gloriously," cried Will. "I think, father, he felt ashamed of all he had said, and wanted to put matters right."

"I hope so," said Mr Willows; "at any-rate I do for my miserable suspicions when the fire broke out."

"Don't worry about that," said the Vicar. "It looked horribly black after his threatenings about revenge. But there, that's all past, and thank Heaven you can congratulate yourself upon the good that has arisen out of to-night's dark work."

"Dark!" said Manners, wiping his black face. "I think we had too much light."

"Not enough to show how that fire broke out," said Mr. Willows, gravely. "I cannot understand how it was caused."

"Couldn't be a spark left by one of the flashes of lightning in the storms we

have had lately, could it?" said Josh, innocently.

"No," said Will, mockingly; "but it might have been a star tumbled down."

"No, it couldn't!" cried Josh, angrily. "Such stuff! It must have been started somehow."

"Yes, my boy," said the Vicar, smiling; "but it is a mystery for the present."

"Let it rest," said Mr. Willows. "I don't concern myself about that now. I have something else on my mind. I shall not rest, Carlile, till I have thanked that man for all he has done, and shaken him by the hand."

"Oh, he'll turn up soon, I daresay," said Manners. "Here, I know! he must have got himself drenched with water."

"Of course!" cried Will. "I saw him lower himself down into the hole to move the suction-pipe."

"That's it," said Manners, "and he's gone up to the cottage to have a change."

"At anyrate," said the Vicar, "I feel thankful that the trouble has passed, and I shall be seeing him back at his work to-morrow; eh, Mr. Willows?"

"I hope so," was the reply. "Now then, we must have three or four watchers for the

rest of the night, and those of you who are wet had better see about a change."

"Well, I'm one," said Manners, "for I feel like a sponge. I'm off to my diggings, but I shall be back in half an hour to join the watch."

"No, no," cried Mr. Willows, "you've done enough. I'll see to that."

"Yes, yes," cried the artist; "I want to come back and think out my plan for a new picture of the mill on fire. It'll be a bit of history, don't you see, and I want to get the scene well soaked into my mind."

"It ought to be burned in already," said Will, laughing.

"Perhaps it is," said the artist, merrily; and he hurried away.

So much time had been spent that, to the surprise of all, the early dawn was beginning to show, and as it broadened it displayed the sorry sight of one end of the mill blackened—a very mass of smoking and steaming timbers.

"I say, Josh," said Will, "only look here! If the fire had got a little more hold and the wind had come more strongly down, the flames would have swept everything before them: the mill would have been like a burnt-out bonfire."

“Yes,” said Josh; “and the house must have gone too.”

“How horrid! But I say, why hasn’t old Boil O been back?”

The man had his own reasons. Not only did he not show himself again after his work was done, but when in the course of the morning, impatient at his non-appearance, his employer left the busy scene where a clearance of the ruined part was going on, and walked up to the cottage with the Vicar, it was only to catch a momentary glimpse of the man they sought, as he glided across his garden and made for the woods, utterly avoiding all advances made by those who wished him well; and instead of the breach being closed by his conduct, the wound purified by the fire, his rage against his master and all friendly to the mill seemed to burn more fiercely than ever.

CHAPTER XVI.

Doings in the Dale.

“IT’S no use to bother,” said Josh, when the state of affairs was being canvassed.

“Father says there’s only one cure for it.”

“What’s that?” said Will.

“Time.”

“I think,” said Will, speaking seriously, “that your father, as he’s a clergyman, ought to give old Boil O a good talking to.”

“What!” cried Josh. “Why, he’s been to the cottage nearly every day, trying to get the old man to listen; but it only makes him more wild. Father says that he shall give it up now, and let him come to his senses.”

“Yes, I suppose that’s best,” said Will.

“Everybody’s been at him. Old Manners says he got him one evening at the bottom of the garden, but, as soon as he began to speak, old Boil O turned upon him so fiercely that he had to cut away.”

“Oh, yes, of course, I’m going to believe

that!" said Josh. "Manners wouldn't run away from a dozen of him."

"Well," cried Will, "he pretty well startled me when I had a try. I'm not going to do it any more, I can tell you."

"My father's right," said Josh. "It only wants time."

But time went on, and the work-people from the nearest town were hard at work day by day rebuilding and restoring, so that by degrees the traces of the late fire began to disappear, while new woodwork, beams, boards and rafters, bearing ruddy, bright new tiles, gave promise that within another three months the night's mishap would be a memory of the past.

It was autumn—a splendid time for fishing; a better time for the painter, the artist declaring that the tints of the trees and bracken, the glow of the skies, and the lovely mists that floated down from the hills and up from the well-charged falls were more glorious than any he had ever seen before.

His white mushroom, as Will called it, was always visible, and the boys spent much time with him when they were not reading with the Vicar up by the church, for Josh had declared that the message that had come from Worksop

was about the jolliest piece of news he had ever heard. Doubtless, the headmaster and his subordinates did not think the same, the news being the breaking out of an exceedingly virulent epidemic of fever, necessitating the closing of the great school about the time when the bulk of the pupils were to return.

Then rumours came that sanitary inspectors had condemned the whole of the arrangements there as being too old-fashioned to be tolerated, and instead of becoming once more a busy hive of study during the autumn term, the whole place had been put in the builders' hands, and rumour said that the school would not reassemble until the spring, even if the builders were got rid of then.

"Well, I don't care," said Will. "I didn't want longer holidays, but it is much nicer reading and doing exercises up at the Vicarage than with old Buzfuz's lexicon over there. I'm learning twice as much, and quite beginning to like Latin now."

"Of course," said Josh, complacently. "My father used to be a famous college don before the Bishop gave him the living here."

"Yes, but he's never been don enough to

bring old Boil O back to his senses. He's worse than ever now."

"Bring him back to his senses! I don't believe he's got any senses to bring back," said Josh. "It wants a very clever college don to put something straight that isn't there."

The boys were right about Drinkwater, for the man was more fiercely morose than ever. His efforts to avoid all who knew him, and spend the greater part of his time moping in the woodlands and high up the valley towards the headwaters of the stream, were so much waste of time, for all men and women too, and the children, for the matter of that, avoided him now as one who was ogreish and evil. Master, Vicar, the artist, and the two lads might cast away all idea of his guilt respecting the fire if they liked, but the work-people declared that his was the hand that fired the mill. Nothing would alter that in their stubborn minds, and no one knew better than James Drinkwater that this was so.

Consequently, he nursed up his blind grudge against the little world in which he dwelt, and became what Will called him—a regular wild man of the woods.

But a change was coming. The autumn

rains were setting in, the woods were often dripping, the mosses holding the rain like so much sponge, and the shelter of a roof becoming an absolute necessity for the one who had sought it merely of a night.

"Yes," said Manners, one morning, "the cuckoo's gone long ago, the swallows are taking flight, and it is getting time for me to pack up my traps and toddle south."

"Oh, what a pity!" cried Will.

"Humph! Yes, for you. What will you chaps do? No one to play tricks with then."

"Oh, I say, Mr. Manners, play fair!" cried Josh. "Why, I'm sure that we've behaved beautifully lately."

"Very," cried the artist. "Why, you young dogs, I've watched you! You've both been sitting on mischief eggs for weeks. It isn't your fault that they didn't hatch."

"Doing what?" cried Josh.

"Well, trying to scheme some new prank. Only you've used up all your stuff, and couldn't think one out."

The boys exchanged glances, and there was a peculiar twinkle in their eyes, a look that the artist interpreted, and knew that he had judged aright.

"But you'll be down again in the spring, Mr. Manners?" cried Will.

"I hope so, my lad. I've grown to look upon Beldale as my second home. I say, you'll come and help me pack my canvases?"

"Of course! Are you going to stick up your toadstool to-day?"

"No; it's going to rain again. It has been raining in the night up in the hills."

"Yes," said Josh; "the big fall is coming down with a regular roar."

"But what about the dam?" said the artist.

"Full, as it ought to be; they're going to open the upper sluice."

"When?" said Manners.

"This afternoon," cried Will.

"Ah, I'll come and see it done. And about my canvases: I must have some pieces of wood to nail round and hold them together."

"As you did last time?" said Will. "Well, old Boil O did that. Won't you let him do it again?"

"I've been after him twice, and whenever I spoke he turned away. Suppose I come

down to the mill workshop. We can cut some strong laths there."

"Of course," said Will; "this afternoon, when we've seen them open the sluice."

"Good," said the artist. "I will be there; but look here, let's carry the canvases down; there are only twelve. Nothing like time present. I'll bring them now."

"You mean, we'll take them now," said Will, correctively.

The matter was arranged by their taking four each.

"Going to take them below to the mill to pack, Mrs. Drinkwater," said Manners, as they went down the path.

"Dear, dear, sir," said the woman, sadly; "it seems so early, and it'll be very dull when you're gone."

"Next spring will soon come, Mrs. Drinkwater," said Manners, cheerily; and the trio strolled on together, to come, at the angle of the second zigzag, plump upon Drinkwater, with one arm round a birch trunk, his right hand to his shaggy brow, leaning away from the path as far as he could, as if gazing down at the dam.

"Morning, Drinkwater," cried Manners, cheerily.

The man started violently, stared at the canvases, then at their bearer, and hurried away in amongst the trees.

"Nice cheerful party that to live with, lads," said the artist, laughingly. "Only fancy being his wife!"

"Yes," said Josh; "and now you see if he don't turn worse than ever. I know."

"Know what?" said Will.

"He'll be as disagreeable as possible, because he's not going to nail up the canvases, and lay it all on his poor wife."

"He'd better not let me hear him," said Manners. "Surly brute! Wouldn't do it himself, and now turns nasty. I saw his savage looks! I should just like to shake some of his temper out of him. Takes a lot of your father's physic, Josh, to set him right."

"Time?" cried the boy. "Ah, he'll have to have a stronger dose."

CHAPTER XVII.

Mysterious Sounds.

THERE was not much to see. The great pool was very full—a great, V-shaped sheet of water, or elongated triangle, whose shortest side was formed by the massive stone dam built across the narrow valley, standing some forty feet high from its base, to keep back the waters, and being naturally, when full, forty feet deep at its lower end.

Mr. Willows and two men were at one end of the wall when Manners and the boys climbed on to it that afternoon, to stand in the middle looking up the valley over the long sheet of water to where it dwindled from some fifty yards wide to less than as many feet.

One of the upper sluices was opened, and though the great mill-wheel in its shed far below was going round at its most rapid rate, urged by the stream of water which passed along the chute, a good-sized fall was spurting out by the upper sluice.

These two exits were, however, not enough

to keep the water down, so rapid was the flow from the hills to swell the stream, and the water in the great pool still rose. Hence it was that the second sluice was to be opened, and in a few minutes a third rush added its roar to that of the other two. Mr. Willows stood watching for a few minutes, till he had satisfied himself by observing the painted marks upon a post that the water had ceased to rise, and then he walked away, leaving the others to chat with the men, who hung back for a few minutes after securing the sluice door, before going down to resume their regular work in the mill.

"Not much of a time for trout fishing, Mr. Manners, sir," said one of the men.

"No," was the reply; "it is all over for the season for me."

"Suppose so, sir. Have you young gents been below there to have a look at the eel-box?"

"Eels?" said Manners. "Ah, I like eels."

"There'll be plenty to-night, sir; they'll be well on the move after sundown. I shouldn't be surprised if there was a good take."

"We ought to be there to see," said Will.

"The rains will have brought them down.

It's rare fun catching the slippery beggars. You'll help, won't you, Mr. Manners?"

"Rather a slimy job," was the reply; "but I'll put on an old coat and pair of trousers, and come. What time?"

"About eight o'clock. That'll do," said Will. "Then you can come in to supper afterwards with us."

"Right!" was the reply; and that night, prompt to their time, Josh, who had called at the cottage on his way down, presented himself at the Mill House garden-gate with Manners, both properly equipped for their slippery task, and finding Will awaiting their arrival.

"Come on," he cried; "I thought you didn't mean to come. I hate waiting in the dark."

He led the way through the garden to the lower gate by the mill-yard, and then right along under the buildings to the huge shed built up over the wheel, which was turning rapidly to the hollow roar of the water descending the chute to pass into the many receptacles at the end of the great spokes, before falling with echoing splashes into the square, stone-built basin below.

It was close to the exit here that a portion

of the great shed had been devoted to the purpose of an eel-trap, which was most effective in warm, rainy times when the flooded waters were full of washed-out worms such as the fat eels loved, but for which they often had to pay very dear, for it came to pass that they were often carried by the swift waters into the great stone chute. Then, in all probability, their fate was sealed, for they would be borne along to the end, writhing and struggling in vain, only to be carried right over the turning wheel before falling into the great, square, stone opening below, where another rushing chute carried them onward into a stout, iron-barred cage whose bottom and sides were so closely set that only the very small could wriggle through. The larger collected in a writhing cluster just where an iron, cage-like door could be opened, and a basket held to receive the spoil.

But this particular night, in spite of its promise, showed no performance. The little party, lantern bearing, descended a flight of steps, hardly able to make each other hear, so great was the echoing splash going on around, and stopped at the bottom in a dank, dripping, stone chamber, close to the floor of the iron cage.

"How are you going to cook 'em, Mr. Manners?" said Will, with his lips close to his companion's ear.

"Some stewed, some spitchcocked, and the rest in a pie."

"Then we're not coming to dine," cried Will, laughing, as he threw the light of the lantern upon the cage, where there was a wet gleam as something slowly glided round.

"Oh, what a shame!" cried Josh. "Why, there's only one!"

"Yes, only one," said Will, "and it isn't worth while to open this nasty, wet, slimy door for him."

"Oh, but there'll be some more," cried Josh; "there's plenty of time. In about an hour there'll be as many as we can carry."

"But we are not going to wait in this dreary hole," said Manners. "I don't enjoy eels when I've got a cold."

"Oh, no," cried Will; "we will go and have a bit of a walk, and come down again."

They drew back from the eel-trap, Will leading the way, and made for a door in the huge shed, where the lantern was carefully extinguished and put on a ledge, before they stepped out into the dark night, the closing of the door behind them shutting in a good

deal of the hollow roar, with its whispering echoes. That which they listened to now was more splash, rush and hurry, as the wheel turned at greater than its usual speed, and the overladen dam relieved itself of its contents.

Still there was too much noise for easy converse, and they tramped on, Will with the intention of climbing to one of the narrow paths that led in the direction of the upper stream.

They were just on a level with the top of the stone dam, when Will stopped short. The spot he had chosen for his halt was dark as pitch, for a clump of bushes overhung the way.

"What's the matter?" said Josh, who came next.

"Be quiet," replied Will.

"Anything wrong?" asked the artist, for they blocked his way.

"No—o," replied Will, dubiously; "only thought I heard something."

"Thought you heard something!" said Manners. "There's not much think about it. My ears seem stuffed so full of sounds that I can hardly hear myself speak. The rushing water and its echoes from up above seem

to fill the air. What did you think you heard?"

"That's what I don't know," said Will, thoughtfully, with his lips close to the speaker's ear; "and I can't hear it at all now. It was a dull, thumping sort of noise."

"Echo," said Josh. "The wheel's going so much faster round than usual."

"N—n—o," said Will; "it wasn't like that. I wish I could hear it again."

"What for?" said Josh. "What was the matter? Here, I say, which way shall we go? I know: let's go and see if any of the old owls are out beating the ivy for birds."

"There," cried Will, "that's it! You can hear it now! Listen!"

All stood perfectly still for a few moments.

"Water, water everywhere, and far too much to drink," said Manners, spoiling a quotation. "I can't hear anything else."

"Oh, Mr. Manners! Why, there it is, quite plain. You can hear it, can't you, Josh?"

"Thumpety, thumpety, thump, thump, thump!" said Josh. "Sounds like somebody beating a bit of carpet indoors. Why, it's only echoes."

"Pooh! What could make echoes like that?"

"The great axle of the wheel worked a little loose in its bearings through the weight of the water."

"Nonsense! Can't be that."

"All right! What is it, then?"

"Don't know, don't care. It's a nocturnal noise, isn't it, Mr. Manners?"

"Well, it's a noise," said the artist, "as if someone was hammering with a wooden mallet. I heard it quite plainly just now, and it seemed to come from below there, out of the darkness down at the bottom of the dam."

"Oh, no," cried Josh, "it was from right up yonder, ever so high."

"No, no," said Will; "it seemed to me to come from just opposite where we are standing now."

"Echo," said the artist, laconically.

"Yes," said Will; "carried here and there by the wind."

"Well," said the artist, "the water makes roaring noise enough, without our listening for echoes. Let's go a bit higher where we can see the sky. It's horribly dark down here, but the stars are very bright if we get out of the shadows. What's the matter?" he said sharply, for Will caught his arm.

"There it is again," cried the boy. "Somebody must be hammering and thumping. What can it be?"

"It's what I said," said Josh; "the bearings of the big wheel are a bit loose. Who could be hammering and thumping in the darkness? Wouldn't he have a light?"

"I don't know," said Will; "but if something's got loose, it ought to be seen to."

"But you couldn't do anything in the dark," said Josh. "My word, what a game it would be if the old wheel broke away! What would happen then?"

"Once started, I should say it would go spinning down the valley for miles," said Manners, laughingly. "Just like a Brobdingnagian boy's hoop gone mad."

"Ah, I should like to see that by daylight," cried Josh.

"I shouldn't," said Will, bitterly. "It wouldn't be much fun. There! now, can you hear it? That thumping?"

"Yes, I heard it then," said Manners, "and I don't think that there's any doubt of its being the echo of something giving a thump as the wheel turns. Is it worth while to go and tell old Jack-of-all-trades

Drinkwater to come and see if anything's wrong?"

"No," said Josh. "I don't believe he'd come."

"Perhaps it's nothing to mind," said Will, thoughtfully; "only, working machinery is such a ticklish thing. There, I can't hear it now."

They stood listening for quite ten minutes, but the unusual sound was not renewed.

"Perhaps it's somebody in the mill," said Will. "Let's go down and look."

"All right; anything to fill up time," said Manners, "before we get my eels. There's no occasion to go up here."

They descended cautiously through the darkness to the mill-yard, following Will, who made straight for the door leading into the machine-room, the fastening yielding to his hand, for few precautions were used in the shape of bar or bolt in that quiet, retired place; and, as the door swung back, the three stood gazing into the darkness before them, listening and feeling. The whole building seemed to thrill with the vibration caused by the turning wheel, the weight of the water making the entire building quiver as if it were alive.

"Rather weird," said Manners. "I never was here before at such a time. Does the place always throb in this way?"

"When the wheel is going fast," replied Will, "it gently shakes the biggest beams."

"Sounds as if it might shake the place down in time."

"Oh, no," said Will; "it's too solid for that."

"Well," said Josh, "there's nobody doing anything here. If there was, there'd be a light. It was only echoes. Come along."

"But if it was echoes," said Will, "why did they leave off?"

"Not so much water coming down perhaps," suggested Manners. "There, isn't it nearly time to go and see if there are any more eels?"

"Hardly," replied Will, "but some might have come down. It's just as it happens."

"Oh, yes," said Josh. "Sometimes there won't be one in a whole night, and another time there'll be pounds and pounds in half an hour. It all depends upon whether they are on the move."

They made for the lower door again at the bottom of the cage shed, and entered the hollow, dismal place. Will felt for the lantern

after closing the door, struck a match, and, to the artist's satisfaction, the rays fell upon several slimy, gleaming objects beyond the bars; and after a good deal of splashing, writhing, and twining themselves in knots, the prisoners were secured in a dripping basket that had been held beneath the opening formed by drawing back the little grating.

"Capital!" cried Manners, eagerly. "Why, there must be half a dozen pounds."

"Nearer a dozen," said Will. "Look out, Josh! Hit that chap over the head, or he'll be out."

Josh struck at the basket-lid, but a big, serpent-like creature had half forced its way through, to be down on the wet stone floor the next moment, making at once for the water a couple of yards away.

"Stop him, Mr. Manners! It's the biggest one. I can't leave the basket."

"And I can't leave the light," said Josh; but, as they spoke, the artist was in full pursuit, seeing as he did that a delicious morsel was going to save itself from being turned into human food.

There was a quick trampling faintly heard on the wet stone floor, followed by a

rush, a glide, a heavy bump, and a roar of smothered laughter.

"Yes, it's all very fine, young fellows," growled the artist, as he gathered himself up; "a nasty, slimy beast! I tried to stop him with my foot, and it was like the first step made in a skate. Has it gone?"

"Gone? Yes," cried Josh. "Never mind; there are plenty left. They're awful things to hold. He would have got away all the same."

"Not if I'd had a good grip," said Manners.

"I don't know," said Will. "He might have got a good grip of you. Those big ones can bite like fun. Are you very wet?"

"Bah! Abominable mess. This floor's covered with slime."

"Shall we stop any longer?"

"No," said the artist; "I've had enough for once. Let's get out in the open air again, and try and find out what made your noise."

In a few minutes they were back on the top of the great stone wall that held the waters back, listening in the darkness amidst the rush and roar of sluices and chute, supplemented by the distant thunder of the heavy falls high up the stream, for the peculiar

thumping whose repetitions had caught Will's ears.

But they listened in vain, and continued their way to Drinkwater's cottage, where the basket with its living freight was placed, spite of the artist's protests, in his landlady's hands.

"Well, I suppose I must keep them," said Manners, "and I will, for this is about the finish up of our games, lads, for this year."

He spoke unconsciously. It was; for as soon as the trio had passed from the dam on their way to the first zigzag, from out of the darkness at one end of the dam the strange, weird noise began again. It was as if heavy blows were being given upon some great iron tool. Now and then they would cease, but only to go on again for quite two hours, till all at once a fresh sound arose—a peculiar, whispering gurgle, which gradually gathered force, to go on increasing through the night; but not another blow was heard to fall.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Danger.

WILL returned to the Mill House that night rather later than he should have been, after a long chat with the artist, and the first thing he learned was that his father had gone to bed with a bad headache.

It was his own time, too, and he hurried up to his bedroom, when, like a flash, came the recollection of the strange sounds he had heard. It was too late to go out again, so he opened the window and leaned there, listening; but from that position he could hear the roar of many waters—nothing more.

As a rule, Will's habit was to bang his head down on the pillow and draw one very deep, long, restful breath, as he stretched himself at full length, and the next moment he was asleep.

Somehow, on this particular night, when he went through his customary movements, the result was that he was more wide-awake than ever. Then for quite two hours he twisted, turned, stretched himself, yawned,

got out of bed and drank cold water, bathed his face, walked up and down, tried to count a hundred forwards, then backwards, counting sheep going through a gap, did everything he could think of, and even thought of standing upon his head to see if that would do any good ; but sleep would not come.

“Am I going to be ill?” he asked himself, and while he was waiting for the answer he dropped off soundly.

But for no pleasant rest, for it was into nightmare-like dreams of some great trouble. While he was trying to sleep, all recollection of the mysterious sounds was in abeyance ; but they attacked him again in his dreams, with this peculiarity, that he seemed to know now exactly where they were. He was able to locate them precisely. There they were—hammer, hammer, hammer, throb, throb, throb, till it was almost maddening.

He tried to escape from them ; he longed to get away ; but there they were in the deep darkness, hemmed in by the deep booming chorus of the falling waters—the only part of his dreams that was real.

For during the whole night, through the sluices, along the chute, and over the wheel, the waters continued their course, keeping

down the overburdened pool to the same level, for once more heavy rains in the hills rushed along the stream to augment the supply.

It was with a feeling of intense relief that the boy woke at last in the faint dawn of morning, sprang from the bed, and rushed to the open window again, to thrust his burning brow out into the cool, fresh air. The beating in his brain was gone, his mind was clear, and he strained out to try whether he could hear through the roar of falling waters the hammering that had tormented him all through the night.

"No," he said, "it's impossible to hear it from this window;" and he hurriedly dressed, to make his way out and up to the spot where he had stood with his friends.

"Nothing now," he said. "Could it have been fancy?"

He listened for a few minutes longer, and then mounted the rough steps, to stand on the top of the great stone wall to listen from there once more, before gazing up the valley and noticing that there were two little clusters of wild-ducks busily feeding just at the mouth of the stream where it entered the pool. There was a faint glow in the east, and flecks

of gold high towards the zenith, promises of a glorious day, and he turned slowly, hesitating as to whether he should go back to bed.

"No! Rubbish!" he said. "I'll go and rouse up old Josh. Yes, and wake up Mr. Manners, too. He'd like to see this glorious sky—ah! what's that?"

That was something unusual which had just caught his eye, for as he spoke he turned to look right along the top of the dam, where he seemed to see a strange disturbance on the surface of the water just at the end where the wall joined the rugged cliff.

"It must be a great trout," he said, "one that's being beaten against the stones, and is half-dead. No; I believe it's an otter."

He ran along the top of the wall and looked down in wonder, to see that a strange whirlpool seemed to have been formed, where twigs of dead wood, bits of grass, and autumn leaves were sailing round and round, before being sucked down a central hole.

"What does that mean?" he thought; but he acted as well as thought, going quite to the edge of the wall, and then descending the steep built-up slope of stones and cemented

earth, to where at the base of the dam-wall he found himself face to face with a sight so suggestive of peril that he turned at once and ran for the mill.

For there below, gushing as it were from the bottom of the wall, was a little stream—a little fount equalling in bulk the tube-like shape formed by the swirling water he had noticed far above.

The quantity was small, and quite a tiny stream ran down the valley, cutting itself a channelled course ; but Will knew enough—knew the power of water, and what such a tiny stream could do. In short, in those brief moments he had grasped the fact that a dangerous flaw had been formed in the dam, which, if unchecked, might mean destruction to them all.

“Father ! Father !” cried Will, rushing into his father’s bedroom.

“I’m afraid it’s worse, my boy,” was the reply. “I’ll lie still for a few hours and see if my headache passes off.”

“Father, wake up ; you don’t understand—the water’s breaking through the dam !”

There was a heavy bump on the floor, which made the wash-hand jug rattle in the basin, as Mr. Willows sprang out of bed, with

his headache quite cured by the nervous shock.

“Do you mean it? Are you sure?”

“Yes, father, it’s twice as big now as it was when I saw it first.”

“Ah!” ejaculated Mr. Willows, and he stood for a moment with brow knit and fists clenched, like a man gazing inwards.

“Run to the big bell, boy, and pull with all your might!”

“Yes, father. Is it very dan——”

“Run! Act!” was the reply, and in a few seconds the great bell was sending its notes in what seemed to the boy a harsh jangle, such as he had never heard before.

Rung at such a time and in such a manner, it carried but one message to those who heard—*Danger!*—and in a very short time the work-people came hurrying from the cottages which formed a scattered village down the vale, to where their master was standing on a block of stone where he could be well seen, waiting to give his orders.

“You, Dacey,” he shouted to the first man, “take one of the horses—don’t stop to saddle—and gallop right down the vale, giving the warning. Stop nowhere—shout as you go by each cottage, ‘The dam bursts!’”

The man was off, and, while Willows was giving fresh orders, the clatter of the horse's hoofs was heard, and the man passed out of sight. Meanwhile, from the directions Willows was giving, the alarm was spreading fast, men's voices giving it everywhere.

There were a few women's shrieks heard, children began to cry, and there was wild excitement about the Mill House. Women's voices, too, were heard remonstrating, and words were uttered about saving this or that; but Willows rushed up to the first group, and shouted—

“Silence, there! Save your lives! Up the sides as fast as you can, and as high as you can climb. At any moment the dam may be washed away like so much salt. Think of nothing but your lives!”

A wild yearning cry full of despair arose at this, but the master's words went home, and the next minute the hurried scrambling of feet was heard, as women, carrying their children, began to climb up the sides of the vale, dragged and pushed up by the men-folk, in whose faces were seen reflected the looks of their chief; but to a man they were grim and stern; and all the while, harsh, wild and strange, bringing down as it were a

shower of echoes of its tones, the great bell rang on, swung to and fro, and over and over under the feverish impulse given by Will's untiring arms.

So effective were the commands, so deeply imbedded in every breast was the knowledge of what might happen, that the time seemed short before Mr. Willows could draw breath and feel satisfied that the weaker portion of the community were in safety.

"Now," he cried, "you who are old, and all you boys, follow the women. No words—Go! Now, my lads, you who are ready to work, let's see what we can save. But, mind, it must be one eye for what you are doing and one for yon tottering wall."

"Why, master," shouted the north-country man, "I don't see nowt. She'll stand for long after we are passed away. Aren't this all a skear?"

"No!" cried Willows, fiercely. "The strong dam is wounded, and the place is bleeding fast. Here, Will," he shouted, "leave that bell!"

"Oh, father," cried the boy, as he ran up, "don't send me away at a time like this."

"I am not going to, my boy; I want you to be my strong right hand. Now then, I

shall not be with you, so watch for your safety and that of those who are with you. Take four men, and save the books first, then the chest, and all you can that is easiest to move. Scatter the things anywhere that they will lodge, as soon as they are higher than the dam. Off with you! Work for your lives! One more word of warning! When the wall goes, if go it does, it will be with one mighty rush, sweeping everything away. Now, six men with me!"

All the rest rushed to him, and he told off the number he required.

"You others," he cried, "you have heard what I've said. Off with you, and try to save your most treasured possessions—by *your*, I mean those of your neighbours and yourselves. At a time like this all must be in common, as it shall be when, if, please God, we escape, I will try to make up to you for what you have lost. Off! Now, my lads, every man lift and bear as big a stone as you can. Follow me!"

The next minute, headed by their chief, a line of men, like ants from a disturbed hill, were seen staggering beneath their burdens up the rugged steps to the top of the dam.

"Phew! This here's a heavy one!"

panted the north-country man as they reached the top. "Say, maister, it'll be dangerous to be safe for us if the wall goes now."

The words were uttered in such a cheery tone, that, in spite of their peril, a hearty laugh rose from the party, and, as Mr. Willows paused for a moment to gaze downward and see how on both the steep sides of the valley his commands were being carried out, a grim smile for a moment relaxed his tightened lips.

"Now," he cried, "do as I do," as he bent himself to his task, and stepping to the end of the wall where the whirlpool seen first by Will had begun to look more worthy of its name—for it was three times as swift and mighty as at its birth—he leaned forward and softly dropped in the great stone he carried, and stood back to let the others follow suit.

"It seems a mere nothing," he said, as the last stone was cast, "but it is all that we can do, and we must keep on."

"Ahoy, there!" came from the opposite end just then. "What's the matter, Mr. Willows?" and the burly figure of the artist came hurrying across the dam. "Not safe?"

There was another hail, and the Vicar

came hurrying down the path, preceded by his son.

"Why, Willows," he cried, breathlessly, "surely the dam is not giving way?"

"Oh, father!" faltered Josh. "It must be that—that——"

"What do you mean, boy? Speak!"

"It is something to do with the noise we all heard last night."

At that moment, with the rising sun shining full upon his fierce, contracted face and glistening bald head, Drinkwater stood leaning out from the farther bank, holding tightly with one hand to an overhanging birch, and if ever countenance wore a fiendish smile, it was his.

CHAPTER XIX.

The Great Peril.

THE Vicar had no chance to ask Josh what he had heard, for the boy had rushed on to the dam, regardless of any danger that might be near, to reach Mr. Willows, to whom he clung breathless and exhausted from his efforts to answer the summons of the bell.

"Where's Will?" he cried, earnestly.

"Where's Will?"

"Safe, boy, safe," replied Willows, huskily.

"Back to the side. It's dangerous here."

"I only wanted to know where Will was. I don't mind now. I'm going to stop and help."

"Ahoy, there! Drinkwater!" shouted the north-country man. "Come on! Here's lots to do. This is bigger job than putting t'fire oot."

The man addressed heard the appeal, shaded his eyes for a moment with his hand, and as if influenced by the strong man's words, came slowly down from his place of vantage to join the group, which now set to work

loosening the stones near the top of the dam, to carry them to the wall end and pitch or roll them down into the weakened part.

For a full half-hour all worked as men had never worked before, conscious the while that those they loved were gathered at each end of the threatened wall high up in safety, and watching their efforts to save the mill. But at the end of that half-hour Willows suddenly stepped to where the Vicar and Manners were toiling like the rest, the latter, with dripping face, displaying his giant strength.

"Stop!" he cried. "The dam is bound to go! Labour in vain! We are sure to have some warning. All follow to the mill. Let's save there all we can."

There was a hearty cheer at this, and the jocose weaver shouted—

"Now, them's the words I like. We'd have stopped till the old dam burst, but speaking for self and family, ah'd say I'd reather not."

There was another good-humoured roar at this, but it was mingled with a sigh of relief, and a swift walk was soon hastened into a run, till all were gathered in a fairly safe

position above the mill, where they paused to breathe.

Willows and his friends came last, the former standing smiling to see the stack of household treasures Will and his helpmates had piled up.

"Well done, my lads!" he cried. "We've come to help you now."

"Have you saved the dam, father?" cried Will, excitedly.

There was a look of resignation on the father's face, as he gazed in his son's eyes and slowly shook his head.

"Ahoy, there! Drinkwater! Ahoy! What are you hinging back there for?" shouted the north-country man. "More wuck to do. Come on and help."

All eyes were directed now to a solitary figure standing on the top of the great stone wall as if inspecting the damaged spot.

"What's he stopping there for?" cried the Vicar, excitedly.

"Why, Drinkwater, my lad," shouted Willows, between his hands, "you can't stay there. Come over to us here. Quick, man! Quick!"

The old fellow turned and shaded his eyes again, gazing fiercely at the speaker, and, as

he lowered his hand and came slowly towards them, Will noticed that across his white brow there was a broad mark of blood.

"Father, look," he whispered, hoarsely ;
"what does that mean?"

"A mark from his hands, my boy. He must have worn them raw. Poor fellow ! He has been like a hero in this strife."

The man came down, still slowly, and then ascended to where the group were awaiting further orders ; but when these orders came, and with a rush the workers formed a line from the mill up to a shelf-like path where by no possibility could the pent-up water rise if the dam gave way, and began handing up rapidly bale after bale of finished silk, and mighty skeins of twisted thread, he did not stir a hand, but stood with the stain upon his brow, leaning against a corner of the mill, apparently exhausted, and never once taking his eyes from his master.

For a full hour the men worked on, cheering loudly as the announcement was made that the wareroom was empty ; and then a rush was made for the Mill House, where in turn all that was portable and good was borne away. Then came the end.

For a long while past Willows and his

friends had ceased to give any thought to the worldly goods, standing together intently watching for the danger they felt must come, and watching as it were in vain ; for, save its ragged edge, from whence stones had been torn, the green and mossy old wall stood intact. The sluices still roared ; along the great chute a solid-looking mass of crystal water rushed and gleamed and flashed before it bent over in a glorious curve to plunge on to the wheel and break in spray, while the men laughed and joked merrily, as they made a play of their heavy toil and shouted gaily to the two groups of watchers—their wives and children and work-mates—who shouted encouragingly back.

And all at once, as if hoping to lighten their labours—lovers of music as these people are—a shrill, musical, woman's voice arose, starting a familiar chorus, which was taken up directly by the young, to rise and fall and swell along the valley, the sweet soprano tones supported by the roaring waters' heavy bass.

“Bravo ! Bravo !” shouted the Vicar, huskily, and as he spoke Will noticed that his voice sounded strange, and in the glance he obtained he noted that his eyes were filled with tears.

The next minute he was hurrying up towards his people, walking-stick in hand, to leap upon a stone where he could be well seen by the choral singers on either side of the vale, and there for about a minute he stood, waving his baton-like stick, conducting his strange double choir, who sang more loudly their cheery mill-song, and at their best, till in an instant, like a thunderclap, there was a sharp report, the song became a wail of agony, and the voice of the master was heard above all, crying—

“For your lives, men, run!”

It could only have been for a few seconds, during which nothing seemed to happen save that there was the patter and scramble of many feet as with one accord all seemed to have made for safety, while, as that haven was reached, all turned their eyes towards the dam, to look in wonder, seeking as they did in vain for the cause of that sharp report.

Another or two of those strangely drawn-out seconds passed, and then the watchers had their reward. The great, green, mossy wall, with all its luxuriance of orange-tinted bracken and golden fern, seemed to shiver as if touched by a passing wind.

Then the quivering motion ceased, the

whole centre crumbled softly down, and it was as if some huge, hoary monster, a living earthquake, had leaped from the prison in which it was bound, to spring upon its prey—the great mill buildings below.

One moment all were there intact ; the next they were gone, and in their place a mighty river of water was tearing down the vale with a hiss and roar that struck the gazers dumb ; and then a great gap was visible where the vast dam wall had been, the pool was empty, there was little more than a stream, and the roaring monster that had swept all before it could be heard gnashing, raging and destroying, far away below.

CHAPTER XX.

Fighting the Destroyer.

AN awful hush of silence. It seemed as if it was too much for human brain to bear. The breath was held pent up in every breast, so that it might have been the dwelling-place of the dumb.

Then the Vicar's voice was heard, and the sound thereof was like the key that opened a closed-up door.

"Where's Mr. Willows?" he shouted.

"Here!" came from close at hand, followed by, "And who has seen Will?"

"Here—close by me," cried Manners.

"Josh! Josh!" shouted Will.

"Here! Here! All right!"

"Then everyone is safe," cried the boy. "No, no, no!" he shouted, in anguished tones. "Where's poor old Boil O? He was there just now, standing by that corner. No, no! there is no corner—everything has gone. Oh, surely he can't be drowned!"

There was no reply, but, headed by Willows, a strong party of the men followed

him and the boys down the track of the mighty torrent—a clean-swept path of stone, for mill, house, sheds, cottages, the whole of the tiny village was not !

There was nothing to impede their way for fully half a mile, and there, in a deep curve down in the valley, in a turgid stream still running fast, lay in wild confusion, baulk and beam, rafter and mass of swept-down stone, the relics of the water's prey.

In his excitement Willows was the first to reach this pool ; but Will was close behind, near enough to stretch out a hand to try and check him as he tore off his coat, rushed to the edge, stepped on to one stone, and leaped to another and another projecting above the surface, before plunging in and swimming towards where a pile of timbers were crushed together with the water foaming by.

"What's he going to do ?" cried Manners, panting as he came up.

"I don't know," cried the boy, wildly. "Oh, Mr. Manners, help me—he'll be drowned !"

As the boy spoke he followed his father's example, to leap from stone to stone and finally plunge in, trying almost vainly to

swim, for the foaming water gave but the poorest support. There were stones, too, everywhere, hewn blocks and others that had been torn from their native beds ; but somehow, helped by the stream, Will reached the spot at length where he could see his father, apparently helpless, clinging to the naked roots of a swept-down tree as if for his very life.

“Father!” cried the boy, as he anchored himself in turn, and gazing in horror in the staring eyes that met his own. “What shall I do?” he cried.

But help was near, and the despairing feeling that was overcoming poor Will died out as the gruff, familiar voice of Manners just behind cried—

“Hold on, Will, lad! That’s right! I’ve got him tight! Why, Willows, man, what’s gone wrong?”

He whom he addressed turned his eyes slowly to give the speaker an appealing look, and then they closed, the head dropped back, the surging waters swept over the face, and, but for the artist’s sturdy arm, it would have gone ill indeed ; but the next moment the fainting man’s head was raised and rested on the artist’s shoulder.

"He must be badly hurt, Will. But all right; I've got him safe, and I'll soon take him to the shore."

"Here, let me take one side," cried Will.

"Nonsense, dear lad! Stay as you are."

"I can't," cried Will; "I must help. He is my father, and I must and will!"

"That's right, my boy, but on my word you can't. I am a strong man, I believe, but it is all I can do to hold my own. If you leave go you'll be swept away, and your father will be drowned; for I tell you now, I couldn't stop by him and see you go."

Will gazed at him blankly, and for a few moments that group in the midst of the tangle of broken timber and jagged root hung together, boy and man staring into each other's eyes.

"Will, dear lad," said the artist, at last, "we are good old friends. Trust and believe in me. I'll save your father if I can. If I don't, it is because I can't, and I've gone too. Promise me you'll hold on there till I come back, or some of your friends come down. They must know how we are fixed. Will you do what I say? I am speaking as your father would. Hold on where you are."

"Would he say that?" gasped Will, faintly.

"He would, I vow."

Will bowed his head, and the next moment he was clinging there, to the clean-washed roots of the upturned tree, watching the heads of father and friend being rapidly swept down the stream, while the waters were surging higher and higher about his breast, for the depression was being filled rapidly by the undammed stream.

"To be alone like this!" groaned Will. "Why didn't I swim with them and try to help?"

He spoke aloud, his words sounding like a long-drawn moan; and then he started, for an echo seemed to come from close at hand, heard plainly above the rushing of the stream. His next thought was that it was fancy, but, as the idea flitted through his brain in silence, there was the moan again from somewhere at the back.

It was the faint cry of someone in grievous peril, and it drove out self from the generous boy's breast. Someone wanted help, and he was strong and hearty still. It took but little time to find out whence the deep-toned moaning came. It was from out of a jagged mass of broken timbers, whose ends were anchored among the stones, and

through them the rising waters were rushing fast.

It was like turning from a great peril into dangers greater far, but the boy never thought of that. He measured the distance with his eyes, and came to the conclusion that he could pass hand by hand through the waters, among the roots, till he was straight above the swaying timbers. To swim would be impossible, he knew; but he felt that he could let himself go, be carried those few yards, catch at one or other of the timbers, and hold on there.

As he finished thinking, he drew a deep breath, felt stronger than ever, and began to act.

Reaching out with his right hand, he got a grip of the nearest root, let go with his left, and in an instant, he felt as if the water had seized him, and was trying to tear his right arm out of the socket. The jerk was numbing, but he got a grip with his left hand, and tried again and again, till he lay on his back, his arms outstretched above his head, his feet pointing straight at the chaos of timbers, took another deep breath, and then let go.

There was a quick, gliding motion, and

his feet struck against one big beam, slipped right over it, and the next minute he was in the very centre of the tangle, while his progress was checked for a sufficiently long time for him to get a good hold, and feel that for the time being he was safe. His breath was coming and going fast, though, from the excitement as well as exertion. And then it was almost in horror that his heart seemed to stand still. It was a momentary sensation, and it gave way to a feeling of joy, for there, close at his side, so near that he could touch, was the grim, upturned face of Drinkwater, with eyes staring wildly into his. He, too, was clinging with all his might to one of the broken timber baulks, and, as his eyes met Will's, he uttered a piteous, gasping cry, and murmured the one word—

“Help !”

That appeal went straight to the boy's heart, and seemed to nerve him for his task.

“Help? Yes !” he cried. “I've come to bring you help ;” and then a pang shot through his breast as he spoke his next words. “Mr. Manners was here just now, *and he'll soon be back.*”

Would, he asked himself, as he thought of his father, those words prove true?

"Cheer up, old fellow!" he cried, and he felt stronger still.

Here was something he could do.

"Can you raise yourself a little higher?" he said, for the rising water lapped in a wave nearly to the sufferer's mouth.

"No, no," said the man, faintly; "I'm gripped between two timbers fast by the legs. There, I feel better now. Ah, Will, lad, I am glad you have come! I can think and see all now. That burning pain has gone from my head, and it's all quite clear. And how just and right all is, if we could always only see."

"Yes, yes, of course," cried Will, cheerily; "but keep a good heart. They'll come and help us soon. But I want to see you higher up; the water's getting deeper, and you must raise your head."

The man smiled softly in his face; his old grim and savage look had gone, and, after making a vain effort, his head sank back so low that the water swept right over his nostrils, and, fast held as he was, he must have drowned; but in an instant Will shifted his position, took another grip, and forced his legs beneath him till his knees were below the prisoner's shoulders, wedging him

up so that he could breathe freely once more.

"There, that's better," cried Will, hoarsely. "You'll be all right now."

"Yes, for a few minutes, lad, but the end is near, and it's all quite right. Will, lad, I used to make toys for you, when you were a little child, and, when you grew bigger, I used to let you spoil my tools, for I never had bairn of my own, and, after my way, I somehow got to love you, lad. And then, I must have gone kinder sorter mad. That burning pain came in my head. I can see it all clearly now, just at the last. I got cursing the best of masters that ever stepped, and one night in a mad fit, I tried to burn him out of house and home; but when I saw the dear old mill a-fire, I couldn't bear it, and fought, like the madman I was, to put it out—and did. Then it all came back again worse and stronger than before. I felt that I must do it—and did. 'The fire fails,' I said, 'but the water wins. It made him a rich man'—your good father, boy—'and now it shall make him poor. My revenge!' I said. Yes, my revenge! Last night, Will—tell him this when I am gone—I got down by the bottom of the dam and worked

with mallet and long crowbar, as I had worked night after night before, till the water began to run just in one little tiny trickle. And then I stopped. Water—my slave then—I knew would do the rest. And it has, lad, just as I thought, given me my revenge, as I called it, but turned and slain me too. Well, it was right it should be so. I know it now. Tell him—my good old master—all that I have said, and ask him to forgive me, if he can, for I know it now—I must have been mad.”

He ceased speaking, and lay quite still with his eyes gazing sadly in the son's face, while a feeling of horror and repulsion was gathering strongly in the lad's breast, till the wretched being spoke again, with the water once more gathering closely about his lips.

“Now then,” he said, “you know the truth. It's all over Will, lad. But for you, I should have been drowned before. You are young and strong; I know you can swim. This water's nowt to you. Go, dear lad, and save your life. Don't look back once to see me die. It would come harder if I thought you did. There,” he gasped, as a wave lapped close to his lips once more, “think of your own self now. I have had

my day, and ended badly. Your time has all to come. Will, lad, bad as I have been, can you grip my hand once more?"

"Only in my heart! If I let go, we both shall drown. There! Cheer up! Help must come soon."

"Not for me. Quick, swim for your life. Good-bye!"

"What, and leave you here to drown? Not if I know it!"

"What, after all that I have done?"

"Yes; I couldn't leave you even now. I tell you, help must come, and—there, what did I say?"

At that moment, the artist's cheery voice sounded from close at hand, and, directly after, he and two more of the mill hands were helping to free the wretched prisoner from his wooden bonds.

CHAPTER XXI.

The Story Told.

THE alarm had so spread, carried as the disaster was by the galloping messenger from the mill, as well as by the flood itself, that help was pouring in from all quarters, and as soon as the sufferers were borne dripping and senseless from the water, scores of hands were ready to bear them into shelter, where doctors soon declared that there was no further danger to fear.

John Willows, as he lay on a couch grasping his son's hand, hurriedly explained his action when he had dashed into the flood, for he had caught sight of Drinkwater for a moment, and seen that he was in peril of his life, but it was only to nearly lose his own, for he had been caught between two heavy beams sailing with the rapid current, and been so crushed that insensibility came on.

As for Drinkwater, he lay calm and sensible, like a man just recovering from some long illness, and there was a look of pathetic

wonder in his eyes that he was still alive which was pitiful to see.

"No wonder," said one of the doctors; "he's been within an inch of losing his life; but in a few days he will be all right again;" and his words proved true.

That same afternoon the man was carried by friendly hands up to his own cottage, which, of course, lay high above the broken dam, while others formed a kind of litter upon which Mr. Willows was borne up to the Vicarage, which he was bidden to consider his home. So that, after the horrors of the morning, as the various employés found shelter or returned to their uninjured homes, a strange feeling of peace began to reign.

It was quite evening when Josh and Will descended to Drinkwater's cottage, Will having declared himself none the worse for all that he had gone through, and, as his father was sleeping calmly, and the boy was looking strained and white, Mr. Carlile agreed that the fresh air would do him good.

"Tell Mr. Manners," he said, "that we have plenty of room here, and that I should be glad if he will join us, and so leave the cottage to its owner, and his wife's hands free. You understand, Josh. Be insistent

and tell him that if he does not come I shall feel quite hurt."

"Yes, father, I understand," cried Josh, and the boys set off. "I wonder," said Josh, "that old Toadstool has not been up."

"Oh, he meant kindly," said Will. "He was afraid of disturbing us, for I heard the doctor tell him that father must be kept very quiet for a day or two."

They reached the cottage, which looked as attractive as ever in its nest of flowers; but, as they approached, they saw no sign of the artist, and they were about to go up to the door when they heard a voice from one of the open bedroom windows, and both stopped short as the words struck their ears.

It was Mrs. Drinkwater speaking, and her voice was half-choked with sobs, so that her words were indistinct. But Will caught this—

"Don't, don't say more. I have nothing to forgive you. It is enough for me that you are your own dear self again."

The boys stole away on tiptoe, Will saying, huskily: "We can't disturb them now. Let's go and look at the broken dam."

Josh stopped short to peer into his companion's face.

"Can you stand it, Will?" he said.

The boy was silent for a few moments, and then, after making an effort to clear his voice—

"Yes," he said, but very huskily. "Everybody has been saved, and I am going to try and bear it like—well, like a man."

"Hooray!" cried Josh, softly. "But I say, what can have become of old Manners?" And then, with a hearty laugh, "I say! Oh, just look there!"

He pointed in the direction of a verdant shelf overlooking the clean-swept vale; and there, beneath his white umbrella, sat the object of their search, calmly smoking his big black briar pipe, contemplating the ruins of the dam and a small pile of stones, the only vestige of the vanished mill.

"Why, here you are," cried Josh.

"Ah, boys," he said, sadly. "But you, Will, ought not you to be in bed?"

"Bed?" cried the boy, scornfully. "What for? Josh lent me a suit of his clothes, and I'm quite dry now."

"Oh, yes," said Manners; "so am I, but I feel as if I could make a handkerchief

precious wet by blubbering like a great, weak girl."

"Oh, don't worry about it," cried Will. "Think how we've all been saved. Father's in the best of heart, and he says as soon as he's well that he'll set to and build the whole place up bigger and better than it was before."

"Yes," said Josh, "I heard him; and he said, too, that he could do it with a better heart in his thankfulness that not a life was lost."

"Ah, yes," said Manners, sadly, "that's quite right, boys; but when you came I wasn't thinking about that, but about my own loss."

"Oh," said Will. "You mean about the place being so spoiled?"

"No, I don't," said the artist, gruffly. "I was thinking about my pictures—twelve canvases, a whole year's work, washed right away, dead, as it were, and buried under some heap of stones. Ah, boys, they were only so much painted cloth, and I'm afraid they were very bad, but it was all so much work that was somehow very dear to me, and—bah! Never say die! I'll begin again like your father, and build up something fresh."

For some days Will paced about the devastated scene, looking white and strange—like one who had a burden on his mind.

The Vicar noticed it, and spoke to the doctor when he came to see his patient.

“Oh, yes,” said the doctor; “I saw it at once. Shock, my dear sir—shock! The poor boy has a deal to bear, but a young, elastic, healthy chap like that will soon come round.”

Josh mentioned it, too, in confidence to his father, saying—

“I don't like poor Will's looks. He's so white and strange.”

But, on hearing the doctor's words, he said—

“Well, he ought to know. We must wait.”

He had not long to wait. A few days later, Will was himself again, for the burden was off his mind. He had rested till he thought that his father was well enough to hear what he had to say, and then, alone by his bedside, he repeated almost word for word the confession Drinkwater had made.

Mr. Willows listened silently right to the end, and then, after a long silence, he lay holding his son's hand clasped between his own.

“Horrible, indeed, my boy,” he said, gently.

“Yes, horrible, indeed, father. What shall you do?”

There was another spell of silence before Mr. Willows spoke again.

“Forgive, my boy,” he said, “as I hope to be forgiven. What did he say when he believed he was a dying man—that he was mad? Those must have been the words of truth.”

They were, for the time passed on, and as the new mill rose, James Drinkwater was one of the busiest hands, restoring the place to its old working state, a man completely changed, the most faithful worker about the establishment.

“It is our joint secret, Will, my boy,” said his father. “Let it rest.”

And it has rested until now, when, long years after the Drinkwaters have been laid to their rest, and Manners, the artist, has ceased to visit the beautiful vale, the story of Will of the Mill is told.

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